

SCS # 1463

Thomas F. Torrance

THEOLOGICAL LECTURES.

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THEOLOGICAL LECTURES

ON SUBJECTS CONNECTED WITH

NATURAL THEOLOGY, EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY,
THE CANON AND INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE.

BY THE LATE

WILLIAM CUNNINGHAM, D.D.,

PRINCIPAL AND PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY, NEW COLLEGE, EDINBURGH.

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PREFACE.

DR CUNNINGHAM on his deathbed committed his Manuscripts to his colleagues, Dr James Buchanan and Dr Bannerman, leaving it to their discretion to publish such of them as they might consider likely to contribute to the edification of the Church. In the exercise of this discretion, they published four volumes from his MSS., and reprinted in one volume articles which had been previously published in Magazines and Reviews, especially in the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, of which Dr Cunningham had for some years been Editor. They did not consider it expedient to publish more at that time ; but they seem to have contemplated it as probable that they might resume at some future time consideration of the expediency of publishing others of his works. But neither of them long survived their beloved Principal. Mrs Cunningham was very desirous that a certain course of Lectures should be published, because she was aware that her husband had bestowed much care and labour

upon their composition and revision, and that he had attached a special value to them as the first-fruits of his professorial labours. This desire was ripened into a resolution, by the receipt of a requisition which was addressed to her by a large number of ministers, in whose minds that particular course of Lectures was associated with their first introduction to their revered teacher, and their first entrance into theological studies. That requisition, with the signatures attached to it, is appended.

At Mrs Cunningham's request, I undertook to supervise the printing of the work, Dr Goold being associated with me in the duty, on the understanding that I should be answerable for the accurate reproduction of the manuscript, and that he should share with me the responsibility of making any slight alteration that might be deemed necessary. I have now to state what alterations have actually been made under that joint responsibility :—

1. A Lecture has been altogether omitted. Lecture XLVIII. was on the subject of acquiring a knowledge of a dead language by means of grammars and lexicons. There was nothing in it of a distinctively theological character, and it was thought better to omit it. Accordingly the Lectures which in this volume appear as Nos. XLVIII., XLIX., L., and LI., are in the original XLIX., L., LI., and LII.

2. A few sentences—not more, I think, than three or

four in all—have been omitted, because they alluded to matters of local and temporary interest ; to the fact that the Lectures were delivered in the first year of their author's Professorship, and that *that* was the first year of the separate existence of the Free Church of Scotland.

3. In order to keep the work within the ordinary dimensions of an 8vo volume, several long extracts from easily accessible books have been omitted, but distinct references have been given to the passages extracted.

An objection will probably be made to the publication of this work so long after its composition ; especially since in the interval many objections have been taken to the doctrines which it defends, which could not have been known to its author. It is quite true that if Dr Cunningham had been alive now, and had been writing on the same subjects, his manner of treating them would have been somewhat different from that in which he treated them five-and-thirty years ago. But in this work he has so established positive truth, and so comprehensively dealt with the principles of all objections that can possibly be brought against it, that the defences he offers are in great measure applicable to all the forms which these objections may assume from time to time. Euclid's *Elements*, and Bacon's *Novum Organum*, and Butler's *Analogy* are never out of date, and I venture to think that the same remark will prove to be applicable to Cunningham's Lectures.

The student will be disappointed if he takes up this volume with the expectation of finding in it a treatise on Natural Theology or the Evidences of Christianity. It is rather a book that may be profitably studied along with standard works on these subjects. It will be found to contain valuable disquisitions as to the "state of the question," and the precise bearing and argumentative value of the various topics discussed in such works.

A considerable portion of the work consists in an exposition of the first chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith. But this will not in any degree lessen its value to students who have not the same relation to that Confession that professors and ministers and theological students of the Free Church of Scotland have.

THOMAS SMITH.

EDINBURGH, 10th June 1878.

REQUISITION

To Mrs CUNNINGHAM,
17 Salisbury Road, Edinburgh.

17th February 1877.

DEAR MADAM,—We, who were Students under your revered husband, Principal Cunningham, remember the admirable Course of Lectures he delivered, but only for two or three Sessions, to the Students of the first year in the Divinity Classes. They embrace the subjects not only of Natural Religion and the Christian Evidences, but also the Divine Origin and Authority of the Bible, the Canon, the Inspiration of the Scriptures, the Rule of Faith, the Criticism of the Text, and such cognate subjects as are of importance and are debated in our day. They have not yet been published, and we earnestly beg of you to give them to the public, being confident they will fully sustain the high reputation of our beloved teacher, and that by the blessing of God their publication will be of essential service to the cause of Christ and of the Bible.

We are,

DEAR MADAM,

With much respect,

Your very obedient Servants,

JOHN C. MACPHAIL, Kilmuir, Skye.	FINLAY MACPHERSON, Larbert.
D. HENDERSON, Rockferry, Cheshire.	JAMES GIBSON, Kirkpatrick-Durham.
JAMES KIPPEN, M.A., Arrochar.	DUNCAN M'LAREN, Dunning.
JAMES ROBERTSON, Cray.	ALEX. B. CAMPBELL, Markinch.
ROBERT STEVENSON, Abernethy.	ALEXANDER FORBES, Drumblade.
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JAMES B. IRVINE, Strathkinnes.

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DAVID WILSON, Renfrew.

ALEX. DAVIDSON, A.M., Harris.

J. B. JOHNSTON, late of Wolflee.

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LECTURE I.

INTRODUCTORY.

YOU have arrived at an important era in your history, an occasion when you are specially called upon to search and try your ways, to realise your responsibility to God, your entire dependence upon the Author of every good and perfect gift, to look steadily and deliberately both behind you and before you, and to adopt resolutions suited to your present circumstances, and fitted to bear extensively and permanently upon your future studies and labours. Your studies have hitherto been directed principally to the improvement of your intellectual powers, and the acquisition of secular knowledge. They are now to be directed to the acquisition of the knowledge of God and of his revealed will. Hitherto, probably, your leading and immediate motives in the prosecution of your studies have been the mere pleasure of intellectual exertion and of the acquisition of knowledge, or, perhaps, the desire of distinction, or a wish to make a creditable preparation for what you had chosen as your future profession in life. *Now* it may be expected that you have taken a closer and fuller view of the office of the Christian ministry to which you have professedly devoted yourselves, and of the purposes it was designed to serve, and that you feel that it is with God you have to do in this matter, that it is with him you are to Hold communion, and to him you are to have respect in all your studies and preparations connected with entering upon his more immediate service. You have ere this time, I trust, been led to some serious reflection upon the end for which you were created, and the objects to which your powers and faculties ought to be devoted. You have been already giving some measure of serious and humble attention to the study of the

word of God, and have been enabled to discern and apprehend the views unfolded there of your relation to God as his creatures, his subjects, and the transgressors of his law, and of the scheme of mercy which God devised and executed by sending his Son into the world to suffer and die for us. Through the knowledge and belief of these truths, you have been led, I trust, to flee for refuge to the hope set before you, to embrace Christ as all your salvation and all your desire. Under the influence of these views, and under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, you have not only received Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, for your own personal salvation, but you have resolved to devote your lives to the service of God in the gospel of his Son, to the great object of making God and Christ and salvation known to your fellow-men. Animated by this desire, and determined by God's grace to carry this resolution into effect, you have come to this place in order that you may acquire the necessary knowledge, and make other necessary preparations for entering upon this important work. This is the position you now occupy; these, I trust, are the motives by which you are animated, and the objects on which your desires are set; and if so, it may be reasonably expected that you will engage in the studies that now lie before you with an activity and a zeal, a seriousness and sense of responsibility, and at the same time with a cheerfulness and alacrity, which you have never known before. The studies in which you have hitherto been engaged have, indeed, been appointed and arranged with a view to your preparation for the study of theology and the work of the ministry, the church having wisely determined that, in the actual circumstances in which we are placed, the general and ordinary rule should be, that men be not admitted to the ministry without some acquaintance with all those departments of knowledge to which your attention has been hitherto directed. It is right and proper that men should come to the work of the ministry with their intellectual powers brought to maturity, and fully and carefully cultivated; and the studies in which you have been engaged are admirably adapted to promote this object. There are some branches of literature and science an acquaintance with which affords facilities for attaining a knowledge of theology, and which are therefore sometimes called the *προπαιδύματα* of theological science. To these your attention has been directed, and you are all, I trust,

possessed of a creditable acquaintance with them. The two great objects of education are the cultivation and improvement of the mental powers, and the positive acquisition of useful knowledge. These two things are in themselves distinct from each other; and it is easy to conceive that they might in fact be in some measure separated—*i. e.* that there might be certain exercises fitted to promote mental improvement without conveying much useful information; and, on the other hand, that much useful information might be communicated which was not fitted proportionately and by comparison to expand and strengthen the mental powers. But though these two things may be to some extent separated, they may be, and commonly are, united; and the great problem to be solved in an investigation of the principles of education is just how this union may be most completely effected—in other words, how education may be so conducted as to secure most fully by *one and the same process* the most thorough improvement of the mental faculties, and the communication of the largest amount of useful knowledge. The studies in which you have been hitherto engaged have been arranged with a view to both these objects, and it is expected that you are now prepared to enter upon the study of theology with your mental powers matured and invigorated by culture and exercise, and in the possession of a large amount of useful knowledge—of knowledge that may be useful to you generally as members of society who have chosen what is commonly called a learned profession, and that may be useful to you more particularly in the prosecution of your professional studies. There is perhaps no study which at a certain period of life is more useful in calling into exercise and improving the mental powers than the study of languages, especially of those languages which are full and copious, and have been carried to a high pitch of cultivation. And in the attention which you have given to the classical languages of Greece and Rome, you are expected to have reaped this advantage, and at the same time to have also derived from the study and the researches to which it necessarily led these two important additional benefits—first, that your taste has been improved and refined by familiarity with the most splendid productions of genius, and with the most perfect models of composition; and second, that you have acquired a large portion of information with respect to the history, geography, and

chronology, the manners and customs, the laws and institutions of the nations of antiquity, and are fully aware of the low state of religion and morality which characterised even those nations which had made the greatest progress in literature, science, and the arts, but which had not been favoured with a supernatural and written revelation of God's will.

You have been engaged also in the study of mathematics, a science of pure demonstration, calling into exercise, and, of course, improving other faculties than those developed in the study of languages, opening up to you new and interesting views of the nature of truth and evidence, of the grounds and certainty of human knowledge, accustoming you to a careful investigation of every successive step in your processes of thought and reasoning, and by the positive information which it communicates, paving the way for a fuller knowledge of the works of creation. Your attention has been directed to the material universe, the work of God's hands, and you have found a profitable exercise for your faculties, and gained much useful information in examining the actual phenomena of nature, in arranging and classifying them, and in investigating the laws by which they are governed. You have thus seen how the heavens declare God's glory, and how the firmament sheweth forth his handiwork; how all his works, great and small, praise him, and to some extent manifest His power, and wisdom, and goodness.

But perhaps the most interesting and important department of all the studies in which you have hitherto been engaged, is that which concerns not the classic writers of antiquity, not the abstract relations of form and numbers, not the material and irrational creation, but man himself, made originally in the image of God, still capable of being restored to that image, and of worshipping, serving, and enjoying God, invested with dominion over the works of creation, and destined not to perish or to be burned up, but to exist for ever. You have been studying man, especially in that respect in which he is distinguished from the lower animals, the possession of a rational and immortal soul. You have been inquiring into his intellectual and moral nature, his powers and capacities, his susceptibilities of emotion, the appetites, desires, and passions by which he is influenced. And your inquiries into the actual constitution of man's intellectual and moral nature have been, or should

have been, applied to two great practical subjects, viz., investigating and ascertaining truth, and discovering and establishing duty. In the investigation of man's intellectual nature, you have been called upon to consider, What is truth? How may it be ascertained? How may man's faculties be most successfully employed in the investigation of it, and best prepared for this work? What are the grounds of the certainty of our knowledge? and what are the different sources from which truth, or clear and certain knowledge, may be derived? And in the examination of man's moral nature, you have been led to consider by what law men ought to form their character and regulate their conduct. What is the relation in which they stand to the great Ruler and Lawgiver of the world, who has formed their mental constitution both in its intellectual and moral departments? What provision has he made in our constitution for guiding us to the knowledge and practice of duty and the attainment of happiness? and what may be learned from the exercise of our faculties upon the works of creation and providence, and the constitution of our own nature, as to the character and moral government of God, the relation in which we stand to him, the service we ought to render to him, the rule by which our conduct ought to be regulated, and the whole course we ought to pursue, that we may attain to the enjoyment of his favour, and the fullest and most permanent happiness of which we are capable?

To the study of all these various subjects your time and attention have been hitherto devoted. By the study of them I trust your intellectual powers have been expanded and invigorated, and much useful and important knowledge has been acquired. Whatever measure of intellectual strength or skill you may have attained, whatever portion of useful knowledge you may possess, you are now called upon to bring to bear upon the study of Christian theology, or of the word of God, the supernatural revelation which he has given us concerning Himself, and concerning our duty and destiny. To God indeed the grand object of knowledge, the great source of obligation, the bestower of all happiness, the author of every good and perfect gift, your attention already has been or should have been directed in the study of his works, and especially in the study of man, the noblest of his works. God's works should be all studied with a reference to him who created and sustains

them. The things that are made should be ever contemplated as having been made and regulated for the purpose of making known the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead ; and moral philosophy, when taught as it should be, unfolds all that can be known of God, and of man's relation to him, from the light of nature and the works of creation and providence, and especially from man's mental constitution, in order to settle aright the nature, ground, and requirements of duty, in so far as these can be known and ascertained without an immediate and supernatural revelation. But you are now to enter upon the study of the truth concerning God, and duty, and happiness, as unfolded to us in the written revelation which God inspired by his Spirit, and has put into our hands. If God has indeed, in addition to the light of nature and the ordinary exercise of their faculties upon the objects around them, given to men a supernatural revelation of his will, professing to communicate to them fuller and clearer views of the most important of all subjects than they could have acquired in any other way, then their first duty is to examine this revelation, and to learn from it what it was fitted and intended to teach, to bring all their powers and faculties, and all the information they may have acquired, to bear, if needful, upon the investigation of its meaning, and the right use and application of its discoveries. And this is in substance the work to which you are now called. It is not indeed supposed that you are at present entirely ignorant of the word of God, and of the views which are there unfolded concerning God and duty, salvation and eternity. On the contrary, it is assumed that you have given some attention to the study of God's word, and that you have already been taught by the Spirit through the word the leading principles of God's oracles, and been taught them so as to have been led by the knowledge and belief of them to choose God as your portion, to embrace Christ as your Saviour, and to devote yourselves to his service—and if so, your eyes have been opened, you have been turned from darkness to light, and are now advancing on your way to Zion with your faces turned thitherwards.

But it is assumed, also, that you have not hitherto given a great deal of attention to the careful and exact study of the word of God in the original languages, that you have not yet thought or read a great deal about the principles that ought to guide you

in the study and interpretation of the sacred Scriptures, that you have not yet spent much time in comparing the different statements of God's word with each other, and trying to form clear and correct conceptions of the general truths which, as a whole, it teaches upon all the various and infinitely important subjects with respect to which it gives us information. It is assumed that while you have not yet had time to give much attention to such exercises as these, in which the study of Christian theology essentially consists, neither have you had much opportunity of making use, for the attainment of the ends to be effected by these exercises, of the assistance to be derived in this work from a knowledge of the labours of those who have brought the largest measure of natural talents, acquired learning, and spiritual discernment, to bear upon the investigation of the character, meaning, and contents of the sacred Scriptures. And if these assumptions are correct, then it follows that you do not yet possess that full, clear, and thorough knowledge of the doctrines of Christian theology and of the grounds on which they rest, that is needful, in order to explain the word of God to others, or to assist them in the explanation and application of it, and are not fully qualified to defend even what you have rightly learned against the assaults of adversaries; and that, on both these grounds, you are not yet fully prepared for entering upon the office of teachers of religion or of ministers of the gospel. You may be, I trust you are, Christians, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, but you are not theologians. You may have been made wise unto your own salvation, but you have yet a great deal to learn, both from the agency of the Holy Spirit through the written word, and also from the writings of men, before you become qualified to be ministers of the New Testament.

A distinction has been often made between religion and theology, which has a real foundation in fact and experience. Both words are indeed used in two senses, somewhat different, though closely related to each other. Both are employed subjectively and objectively—subjectively as descriptive of qualities or properties of a man, or as the old theological writers are accustomed to say, "*habitus homini hærentes*," by the possession of which a man becomes respectively a religious man and a theologian; and objectively as descriptive of a system of opinions and sentiments irrespective of

those who hold them. In the latter sense we speak of the Christian religion and of Christian theology, and when thus used there is scarcely any difference in meaning between them; they both mean that system of truths derived from the word of God which constitutes Christianity. It is when they are used subjectively that the difference between them appears, and it is a difference only in degree. Religion, as descriptive of that in a man which entitles him to be called religious, is a real knowledge of the true God, leading him to worship and to serve him; and it is usually regarded as conveying the idea that the man of whom it is predicated has so much knowledge of God, and knowledge of such a practical and effective kind, as to produce such a character and conduct as affords materials for cherishing a confident hope of his ultimate happiness.

A religious man, therefore, is practically just a true Christian, one who has acquired so much knowledge of God and of the way of salvation, and of the path of duty, from the Christian revelation, and who is so using and applying this knowledge, as that there is good ground to believe that he is advancing in the way that leadeth to glory, honour, and immortality, and that he will ultimately secure eternal life. Theology, used subjectively, as descriptive of that in a man which entitles him to be called a theologian, means a full and comprehensive and well-digested knowledge of God, and of everything needful to be known, in order to worshipping and serving him aright, such as may not only avail for the regulation of his own conduct, and the securing of his own personal happiness, but may qualify him for becoming a teacher or instructor of others. And in accordance with this view of its meaning, it is well known that when we apply the term theologian to one who is not in the office of the ministry, not using it merely as a common designation of a particular profession, we intend to convey the idea that he is possessed of a much fuller and more thorough acquaintance with religious subjects than is usually exhibited by those who have not studied religion professionally; such an acquaintance with these subjects as that he would be fairly entitled to speak or write about them for the instruction or information of others. Theology then used subjectively, and distinguished from religion, is descriptive of a full, comprehensive, well-digested knowledge of God and of divine things, such as may qualify for the instruction of our fellowmen.

The words theology and theologian were used by the ancient classical writers. They applied the word theologian both to the poets who had given the fullest accounts of their gods, and to the philosophers who had most fully prosecuted their inquiries into the nature of God and of man's relation to him. The words theology and theologian do not occur in Scripture, though there are phrases which are virtually synonymous with them, and which naturally led to the formation and use of such words. The word *Θεολογος* occurs in the inscription of the Apocalypse, which is called the Revelation of John the Divine, but from the way in which this word was commonly used about the time when this inscription was probably attached to it—for the time is not certainly known—the word was in all likelihood intended to be descriptive of the fact that John had written much about the divinity of the Saviour. In the third and fourth centuries a theologian usually meant one who distinguished himself by his exertions in illustrating and defending the personality and divinity of the Logos, a limitation in the use of the word which has long since passed away. Its meaning is now settled as descriptive of a full, thorough, and well-digested knowledge of God, and of all that God has made known to us.

We do not usually apply the word religion to a man, or speak of him as religious, except when we mean to convey the idea that, so far as we can judge, the knowledge he has acquired concerning God, is really applied in the way of leading him to worship God and to serve him. But the spectacle has been so often presented of men who had acquired a large measure of information upon subjects connected with God and religion, and who even held the office of public religious instructors, but who gave no evidence that they were really living under the practical influence of the doctrines which they preached, discussed, or defended, that we do not so generally associate with the common use of the words theology and theologians, any reference to the personal character of the individual, and do not hesitate to speak of men as great theologians, even when there may be abundant ground to fear that they have never made any such use of their studies in theology, or of their examination of the word of God, as to have become themselves wise unto salvation. It is indeed true that men who are still walking in darkness, led captive by Satan at his will, may devote much time to the examination of the Scriptures and to the

reading of theological works, and thus in a certain sense acquire much knowledge, so as to be qualified to speak and write learnedly upon theological subjects, and even to throw some light upon the exact interpretation of some Scriptural statements. But men who have never really submitted their understandings and their hearts to the influence and authority of the Bible as a divine revelation, and who have never really seen God as he has made himself known in his word, cannot with propriety be said to know God or Christian theology, and are not properly entitled to the name of theologians. It is eternal life to know God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, and therefore men who are putting away from them the eternal life which is offered them, cannot be properly said to know God or the Saviour. The apostle lays down a principle upon this subject which is of universal application, and ought never to be overlooked or forgotten, when he says, 2 Cor. ii. 14, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." We know that even the spiritual man—the man who has been born again of the word of God, through the belief of the truth, receiveth the things of the Spirit of God only as they are set forth in the word; and clearly as they are set forth there, no one can receive them so as fully to know and comprehend them, except through the agency of the Holy Ghost. Hence it follows that the apostle's declaration that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, and that he cannot know them, implies that no man in his natural state, without the renovation of his nature and the indwelling of the Spirit, really knows or comprehends, in any proper sense, the leading and most important declarations of the sacred Scriptures. If it be the clear doctrine of Scripture, that a man still unconverted cannot know the things of the Spirit, however fully and plainly they are stated in the word of God, then by whatever name the information he may have acquired concerning scriptural and theological subjects may be designated, he ought not to be called a theologian.

And all who have resolved to devote themselves to theological study are called upon to give their most serious attention to this most momentous question, whether they have been brought into that condition in which alone they can acquire any real knowledge of the things of the Spirit as revealed in the sacred Scriptures;

whether the grand obstacle which the natural darkness of their understandings and the natural ungodliness of their hearts interpose in the way of their making any real progress in theology, or in the knowledge of God and of divine things, has yet been taken out of the way. This is the first and fundamental qualification for the profitable study of theology, and the want of it nothing else whatever can supply. In accordance with these views, so plainly based upon Scripture, some distinguished writers have introduced into their definitions of theology and of a theologian, the idea that a theologian, one really deserving of the name, must be a converted man, and that theology, or a real knowledge of God and of divine things, can be predicated only of a man whose nature has been renewed, and whose understanding has been enlightened by the Spirit of God. Among the definitions which have been given of these words, I have not met with any one that seems to me, upon the whole, preferable to that given by Buddæus, a celebrated divine of the Lutheran Church, all whose works are most valuable, as he was eminently distinguished by a remarkable combination of piety and moderation, judgment and erudition. He defines or describes them in this way:—"Qui inter Christianos non tantum vera fide imbuti sunt, sed etiam numinis munere eam præ reliquis adepti sunt facultatem ut sacræ doctrinæ, qua Christiana religio constat, capita rite proponere, explicare, et contra dissentientium insultus defendere, aliosque adeo ad veram fidem perducere, aut in ea confirmare, possint, voce recepta theologi vocari solent." And theology itself—that, the possession of which makes a man a theologian—he defines to be "*Scientia rerum divinarum homini peccatori ad salutem consequendam cognitu necessariarum, prout ex scriptura sacra nobis constant, cum facultate eas iterum alios docendi, confirmandi atque defendendi conjuncta;*" and this knowledge of divine things he says, must be true, certain, and efficacious; and after fully explaining these definitions or descriptions, he concludes again, "*Ex dictis consequitur eum qui jure et merito theologus dici potest non alium esse quam hominem vera fide præditum seu regeneritum.*"¹

Such then is the work in which you are to be henceforth engaged. You are supposed to have been led already so far to know God and the views opened up in his word as to have resolved

¹ *Instit. Theol. Dog. Lib.*, I. c. I., sect. 32-49, pp. 51, 53, 55, and 66.

not only to take his word as a light to your feet and a lamp to your path, that you may be guided to heaven, but to devote yourselves to the promotion of the spiritual welfare and salvation of your fellow-men, and with this view, to be intent now on gaining that full and intelligent knowledge of God's revelation, which may fit you for becoming the instructors and guides of others. To ascertain the true origin, character, and authority of this revelation, and to be so familiar with the grounds on which the views you hold upon these points rest, that you may be able to defend it against adversaries, and press it upon men's notice and study; to investigate fully and carefully the meaning of the Bible, so as to be able to expound and enforce its contents, and bring them to bear most successfully upon men for their conversion and growth in knowledge and in grace, is henceforth to be your principal occupation. To ascertain and open up the mind of the Spirit in the word, and to apply it for the spiritual welfare of others, is to be the chief business of your future lives. As preliminary, however, to this work, it is necessary that you understand fully and intelligently, so as to be able to state and defend your opinions—first, what the Bible is; and second, how or in what way the mind of the Spirit is to be ascertained from it; and that then, with your understandings and hearts deeply impressed with right views upon these subjects, you devote yourselves to the study of the word itself, and bring all the powers of your minds, and all the knowledge and skill and experience you may have acquired, to bear, not merely upon the correct interpretation of its statements singly and separately, although that is the basis of all sound knowledge of Christian theology, but upon the formation of right conceptions of the whole mind of God as revealed, with respect to everything contained in the sacred volume, giving their due place and prominence to those subjects which are manifestly possessed of the greatest intrinsic importance. The study of the Scriptures is so ordinary and familiar an occupation, especially with many who have no pretensions to rank among the noble, the wise, and the mighty, that men are sometimes apt to associate it with ignorance, weakness, and obscurity, and to imagine that theology, when elevated to the rank of a science (and indeed to the place of the first and highest of the sciences, for so it has ever been regarded in all Christian countries), and when taught in academic halls, must

be something totally different in kind, and must rest upon some other basis than the correct interpretation of Scripture, and to look upon the careful and exact investigation of the meaning of scriptural statements with something like contempt. Spiritual pride produces this feeling, as well as pride of reason and science. This notion, or anything approaching to it, is a dangerous delusion. The bringing out the true meaning of the statements of Scripture, and the deducing from a comparison of them the whole scheme of truth and duty which are taught us in the word, are the only means of attaining to a just and well-grounded knowledge of theology, and afford the fullest exercise for all the highest powers of the human mind, while they require the constant presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. And of that whole process the correct interpretation of the statements of Scripture is the basis and foundation, the only certain ground on which a real knowledge of God and of divine things can rest. You have already in your previous studies examined the book of nature, the works of creation, that you might know the truth concerning God and your own duty. You are now called upon to examine his word, which he has magnified above all his works, and which at least as much needs and deserves a minute and careful investigation. You have, as it were, exhausted all other means of attaining to clear and certain knowledge of truth and duty and happiness, and nothing now remains but that you listen to the voice of God speaking in his word, and subordinate everything to the object of ascertaining and understanding fully what he has told you.

A full, correct, and intelligent acquaintance with the Scriptures is not by any means so easy or so ordinary an attainment as men are sometimes apt to suppose. It requires a larger measure of natural ability, a higher degree of acquired learning, and a greater amount of patient and laborious study than is commonly imagined. It is quite true that the great leading doctrines and duties of Christianity are very plainly set forth in Scripture, and that every thing needful to guide men to the saving knowledge of the truth and the enjoyment of eternal blessedness, may be certainly learned, under the guidance of God's Spirit, from almost any translation of the Scriptures, by men who have but a very small measure of intellectual culture and of acquired knowledge; and it is also true, that men who, from the teaching of the Spirit and of the

word, have got a clear perception and a firm hold of the leading principles of God's oracles, are not likely to fall into any very dangerous errors in the interpretation of particular portions of Scripture. But though all this is true, and most important and encouraging truth it is, it has nothing to do with the question as to what kind and degree of knowledge of God's word may be attained, and ought to be aimed at, and what may be reasonably expected of those who aspire to be the public instructors of others. They ought not to be contented with knowing the word of God through the help of a translation, when they have opportunities of becoming acquainted with the original. They ought not to be satisfied with understanding the few fundamental principles of Scriptural truth, but are bound to acquire as thorough and accurate a knowledge as they can of the whole volume which God's Spirit inspired. They should not be contented, as men too often are, with a mere familiarity with the sense of the words, with some vague and indefinite inkling of the meaning of a scriptural statement, but are bound to employ all such means as may be necessary for understanding fully and establishing firmly the exact meaning of God's declarations, and to bring as much of meditation and reflection to bear upon them as may produce clear and definite conceptions of their import. It is of indispensable importance that ministers of the gospel have their hearts saturated with the general spirit and substance of God's word, with the leading views which are there unfolded, but it is necessary also that they have so full and accurate a knowledge of the exact meaning of the particular statements of Scripture, as to be able to open them up and expound them to others, to bring out clearly and intelligently the grounds in the correct interpretation of God's word on which their own convictions rest, and to defend them if needful against the assaults of adversaries. Ministers of the gospel ought not, in the execution of their function, which consists mainly in opening up and expounding the mind of the Spirit in the word, to be wholly dependent upon translators and commentators, but should be capable of understanding the original inspired writings; and though not all profound scholars and critics themselves, at least able to appreciate and to apply the erudite and critical labours of others. There is nothing which affords so abundant a supply of interesting, wholesome, and edifying matter for public instruction, as that knowledge which is

the result of a thorough familiarity with God's word, of much meditation and reflection upon the statements of Scripture ; and if men will attempt to expound and apply the word of God for the instruction of others, they are bound by the most solemn obligations to take all possible pains, and to use all practicable means, first for satisfying themselves, and then for convincing others, that what they are setting forth from the Scriptures is what God really teaches in that portion of his inspired word which they are considering. It is not enough that the matter set forth be the truth of God, it is also required, to use the language of our Directory for Public Worship, "that it be a truth contained in or grounded on that text, that the hearers may discern how God teacheth it from thence." If it be the great duty of the ministers of the gospel to explain and open up the Word of God in its true meaning and real import for the salvation of men, then it is manifest that their theological education should be principally directed to these two objects—first, that they acquire that information, form these habits, and be impressed with these general views and principles, which may constrain them ever after to devote their principal attention to the study of God's Word, and may afford them the best assistance in attaining most speedily and most certainly to a correct knowledge of the meaning of its statements ; and second, that they become intelligently and accurately acquainted on scriptural grounds with those fundamental doctrines of revelation which ought to pervade all their efforts to instruct their fellow-men, as bearing most directly and immediately upon the salvation of sinners, and which, when distinctly perceived, and firmly held, and faithfully applied, will preserve them from radical or fundamental error in the interpretation of any portion of Scripture.

All the knowledge then you may have acquired, all the experience and skill you may have attained, are henceforth to be brought to bear more or less directly upon the study of the sacred Scriptures, and the great object of acquiring a real, thorough, and influential knowledge of God and of divine things from the revelation which he has given us. The subjects of study to which your attention has been hitherto directed need not, and should not, be altogether neglected, but they must be subordinated to the study of divine truth in God's word. The books of the Old and New Testament are the only classics to which henceforth you are to

apply the precept, "*Nocturna versate manu, versate diurna.*" The divine character and government you are henceforth to study, not in the dim light of nature, but in the bright effulgence of revelation. The character, duty, and destiny of man you are to investigate, not merely by looking within yourselves upon your hearts, and looking around you on the position in which you find yourselves placed, but by studying the information communicated to you on all these subjects by Him who made the heart and who knows it best, who alone is entitled to regulate our conduct, and who alone determines our destiny. And in investigating these infinitely important subjects, and in seeking to form clear, definite, and impressive conceptions regarding them, such as may most powerfully influence yourselves and most fully qualify you for becoming the instructors of others, you may, even when most fully enjoying the guidance of God's Spirit and the light of his word, and when most humbly and implicitly submitting to their teaching, find full scope for the exercise of the highest powers and the most exalted faculties which God has ever conferred upon any of the human race.

Christian theology, then, is the knowledge of God and of divine things, especially of Him who is the image of the invisible God, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, derived from the sacred Scriptures. A full and adequate knowledge of these things, adequate, *i.e.* so far as God has revealed it and man is capable of receiving it, can reside only in a habile or capable subject, in one whose eyes have been opened, whose understanding has been enlightened, and whose nature has been renewed. It can come only from the operation of the Spirit of truth convincing men of the divine authority of the word, and enabling them to understand its meaning; and wherever and in so far as it has been conferred, it is to be employed for promoting God's glory and the eternal welfare of men, for advancing our own conformity to God's image and meetness for his presence, for diffusing scriptural views of God and Christ and the way of salvation in the world, and for leading men to embrace Christ, and to grow up in all things unto Him who is the head. It is to the attainment of this knowledge that your studies and prayers should now be directed. You seek it, because God has already in some measure opened your eyes and enabled you to discern something of its excellency, so that you desire to know

more of it and to live more under its power. You seek it because you have been led to devote yourselves to the work of the ministry, and are conscious that you must have much more knowledge of God and his word and of the way of salvation, before you could venture to engage in the arduous and responsible work of instructing others in the mysteries of the kingdom. And you are resolved to seek it *from God*, because you know from his declaration and your past experience that you can obtain it nowhere else, and that he giveth liberally and upbraideth not; while at the same time you are determined to employ all the means, to improve all the opportunities, and to avail yourselves of all the assistance which there is any reason to expect that God will bless for attaining this end. These, I trust, are your views, your desires, and your purposes. If it be not so, there is but little reason to expect that you will make any real progress in the studies in which you are about to be engaged, or that without an entire change of heart and character you can become qualified for the work of the Christian ministry. But if you are influenced by these views and desires, and are enabled to carry out these purposes, then we can confidently hold out to you much pure satisfaction, much exalted enjoyment in the prosecution of your studies; and, if it please God to spare you, we can set before you a most encouraging prospect of abundant usefulness in the vineyard of the Lord. I would fain regard it as a *presumption* that you are in some measure influenced by such views and feelings as these, that you have resolved to cast in your lot with the Free Church of Scotland. . . . We cannot hold out to you in the ministry of the Free Church the prospect of worldly honours and emoluments, of the favour or countenance of the wealthy and the powerful, or of the enjoyment of ease or idleness. With us you must be prepared to endure hardness, as good soldiers of Christ Jesus. But we can offer you a place in the ministry of a Church which, blessed be God, maintains the truth of God, and which therefore he may be reasonably expected to bless. We can hold out to you a wide field of usefulness, abundant opportunities of labouring in Christ's cause, in circumstances which afford an encouraging prospect of success. God has set before us an open door—no man can shut it; and, so far as we can judge from the state-

ments of God's word, the general principles of his moral government, and the indications of his providence, there is no reason to fear that he will speedily close it. When He who had struck Paul with blindness on his way to Damascus was directing Ananias to go and visit him, that he might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost, he assured him that Paul was "a chosen vessel to bear his name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel;" and then he added, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts ix. 16); seemingly intending to represent both the sufferings themselves, and the previous intimation of them, as tokens of his favour and his kindness. And men who have any real love to the Saviour, and any honest zeal for his glory, will not shrink from his service because of the difficulties and hardships that may lie before them in the work to which they may be called.

I have said that I would fain regard it as a presumption that you have chosen the ministry from the right motives, and are resolved to prosecute your studies in a right spirit, that you have cast in your lot with the Free Church of Scotland; but I must warn you against imagining that this circumstance, or indeed anything that is external and applies to men in the mass, can afford any sufficient ground for establishing the soundness of your principles or the purity of your motives. The deceitfulness of sin, and the deceitfulness of men's hearts, are continually at work, leading men to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. Satan is continually exerting his utmost skill and activity to introduce into the ministry of the professing church men who will be in reality his servants and not the servants of Christ. He knows well that nothing tends so much to the advancement of his cause as an unconverted ministry. He will not fail to direct his efforts in this respect against the Free Church of Scotland, and we can scarcely cherish the hope that he will be altogether unsuccessful. There are some obvious advantages of which he will not fail to avail himself. There are some views and considerations which may induce men to join the Free Church of Scotland, of a more creditable and elevated kind than worldliness or selfishness in their proper forms, but which yet may be entirely separated from that fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom, from real godliness of heart and motive, from real love

to the Saviour and regard to his honour. There cannot be a reasonable doubt that the principles for which the Free Church of Scotland has been called upon to testify and to suffer are in substance the same for which our forefathers laid down their lives, and are thus associated with circumstances and transactions which have always had a strong hold upon the hearts and feelings of Scottish Presbyterians, and which must appeal most powerfully to every patriotic and generous mind. Although, then, your preferring the Free Church may prove that you have triumphed over selfishness in some of its lower and grosser forms, and have subordinated them to some of the higher and nobler principles of our nature, it is still quite a possible thing that you may be deceiving yourselves as to your motives in entering upon the study of theology with a view to the office of the ministry, and in doing so in the circumstances in which you have placed yourselves. And I have adverted to this subject for the purpose of warning you that you should not trust to mere presumptions and probabilities in judging of the state of your hearts, and the motives by which you are animated, but that, fully alive to the dangers of self-deceit, you search and try your ways, see that you have really devoted yourselves to Christ's service, and are now ready and willing to do whatever may be best fitted to prepare you for usefulness in his vineyard; to exert yourselves and to deny yourselves, that you may acquire all that knowledge, and form all those habits, which may prepare you for usefulness and respectability in the ministry; animated and encouraged amid all your studies and all your labours by a growing regard to the glory of God, by increasing love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the souls of perishing men.

Christian theology is, as we have explained to you, a knowledge of God and divine things as they are set before us in the sacred Scriptures. The principal exercise, therefore, by which this knowledge is to be acquired, so far as natural means or human agency is concerned, must be the investigation of the meaning of God's word, and the application of the ascertained meaning of its various statements to the formation of clear and distinct conceptions as to the mind and will of God with regard to all the different subjects which the statements of Scripture respect. This ought to be one of your principal exercises during the remainder of your lives, and

the foundation of the knowledge and of the habits by which it may be successfully prosecuted should be laid during your attendance at this place. There are, however, some important topics which are in a certain sense preliminary to this. When the general nature and object of theology are explained and illustrated, the first questions that naturally occur are—What are these sacred Scriptures? Why ought they to be studied with such care and diligence? In what way and by what means may their meaning be most correctly and certainly ascertained?

The sacred Scripture contains a revelation from God; or, in other words, the Jewish and Christian religions are true; and not only so, but the Scriptures are themselves the word of God given by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and intended by him to be the exclusive rule of faith and practice. It is for these reasons that they ought to be studied, and that all appropriate means should be sedulously and unceasingly employed by which we may attain to a correct and certain knowledge of their meaning. It is with the investigation of these preliminary subjects that you are to be mainly occupied at this class during the first session of your theological studies—the evidences of Christianity, the canonicity and inspiration of the books of Scripture, their sufficiency, perfection, and exclusive authority as the rule of faith and practice (a subject of more interest and importance in the present day than in some preceding generations, in consequence of the revival of Popish corruptions by many men who have not yet joined the Church of Rome); and the general principles of scriptural interpretation, the leading considerations that ought to be kept in view and acted upon in order that you may attain to a correct understanding of their meaning, and the best mode of applying them to the purpose they were intended to serve. I would not like to spend a whole session merely *about* the Scriptures without entering at all within them. I have it in contemplation to examine those portions of the sacred Scriptures which give us information concerning the Scriptures themselves, selecting these portions because the information they contain bears most directly upon the general subject of the course, but meaning to attempt to treat them so as to illustrate some of the principal rules according to which the general interpretation of Scripture ought to be conducted. In this way I hope to be able, in the course of the session, to bring

before you, and to assist you in more fully understanding the import and the grounds of the truths we believe concerning the origin, the authority, the character and perfection, the objects and uses of the sacred Scriptures, and the way and manner in which they ought to be interpreted and applied, in order that having sound views upon all these points deeply impressed upon your minds, you may thus have a good foundation laid for all your future studies and labours in investigating, as fully as you can, the meaning of the word of God, and in seeking to have the fullest and most intelligent comprehension of all those leading truths with respect both to belief and to practice which, "according to the commandment of the everlasting God, have been made known unto all nations for the obedience of faith."

If a high and solemn responsibility attaches to every one of you in beginning such a course of study as this, and preparing for such an occupation as the ministry of the gospel, how great must be the responsibility of those who are called to superintend your studies, and to assist you in the prosecution of them !

I trust I am not altogether insensible of the responsibility that attaches to me, and of my insufficiency for these things. But we all need to be more deeply humbled and more thoroughly abased, and to be stirred up to seek for ourselves, and for each other, that God would make his grace sufficient for us and perfect his strength in our weakness. It is my hope and expectation that the zeal and ardour with which you will engage in the prosecution of your studies, and the copious effusion, given in answer to our prayers, of the Spirit of him who alone teacheth savingly and to profit, will make you in a great measure independent of your instructor for your progress in the knowledge of divine things, but may at the same time make even the feeble and imperfect assistance which he may be able to render you not altogether unprofitable. I trust I can with some measure of sincerity adopt the language of the Apostle, and say, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God ; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness"

(Col. i. 9-11), and this result will most assuredly be realized if each one of you is prepared to adopt the language of the same Apostle on another occasion, and to say, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord : for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith : that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death ; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead " (Phil. iii. 7-11).



LECTURE II.

DIVISION OF THE SUBJECT.

HAVING adverted briefly and generally to the character and objects of the studies which are to occupy your attention, and, I trust, to engross your time and your faculties for several years, if the Lord should be pleased to spare you, it may be proper to give you a somewhat more detailed view of the extent of theological science, of the different branches into which it has been or may be divided, and of the way and manner in which the study of it ought to be conducted. It is right that you should, at this early period of your studies, be duly impressed with the magnitude and extent of the work which, even when viewed simply and in the first instance as the study of a branch of knowledge, lies before you; and just because of the magnitude and extent of the subject, it is the more important that you have some practical directions to assist you in the regulation of your studies, and especially to point out how you may most usefully employ the time to be more particularly devoted to this object, so as to secure that you may all acquire that measure of knowledge of theological science, which may be regarded as indispensable before you enter upon the work of the ministry, and may at the same time lay the best foundation for the prosecuting those investigations into the revealed mind and will of God, which should continue so long as you live. After having described the different branches of theological science in the order in which they ought to be studied, I shall suggest some practical counsels that may assist you in the work, and point out the spirit as well as the manner in which this study ought to be prosecuted. Those who are to be engaged in this study are men, rational and intelligent beings, who find themselves possessed of certain faculties and capacities of investigating truth and acquiring knowledge, and the

object of their investigation is God, of whom they have been led to conceive as a great and glorious Being, who has created all things, and who preserves and governs them. In directing their attention to this subject, with the view of carefully investigating it, the first questions that naturally occur are such as these: How may God and his will be known? What means have we of attaining to the knowledge of Him? What do we know or believe concerning Him already? From what source has this knowledge of Him been derived? and on what basis does it rest? These questions lead us at once to the consideration of what we can learn concerning God from the constitution of our natures and the exercise of our faculties upon ourselves, and upon the objects around us, and should also lead us further to inquire, whether God has at any time given to men any more direct and formal revelation concerning himself. The investigation of what may be known about God from the exercise of those faculties which form the leading characteristic of our species upon ourselves, and upon the other objects accessible to us, constitute what is commonly called natural religion, or the religion of nature, as distinguished from that knowledge which God is believed to have imparted to men concerning himself through direct communications which he has made to them. If God has made any direct communications to men concerning himself, it may be naturally supposed that these will convey to us more clear and certain knowledge than could be acquired in any other way; and men will therefore reasonably turn their attention to professed revelations from God concerning himself, and examine their claims to credibility. The Jewish religion and the Christian religion alone have any such verisimilitude as to entitle their claims to a careful examination, and to an investigation therefore of the claims of these religions to a divine origin will the attention of men who are desirous to attain to certain knowledge concerning God be naturally directed.

The account both of the Jewish and the Christian religion is to be found in that collection of writings which we call the Bible or the sacred Scriptures. To ascertain the character and the claims of these writings is to investigate the truth of these religions; and if it can be proved that they do indeed contain a revelation from God, then an investigation of their meaning must constitute mainly and principally the study of theology. The study of

Christian theology, indeed, is just the investigation of the meaning and application of the revelation which God has given us concerning himself, as contained in the sacred Scriptures; and Christian theology itself is just a name descriptive of the whole information to be derived from that source concerning God, his character, government, and relation to us, his purposes with regard to us, and the duty which he requires of us. But while Christian theology is properly the knowledge derived from the sacred Scriptures, viewed as already proved to contain a revelation from God, and while the study of it, therefore, may be said to consist in investigating and ascertaining the meaning and import of what the sacred Scriptures contain, and employing their discoveries for regulating our opinions and our conduct, yet it has been customary to include under it, and as indeed the first branch of it, the investigation of the claims of the Scriptures to the reception they have met with as being, or at least as containing, a divine revelation. And accordingly, in most of the older systems of theology, it is common to begin, after some general explanation of the nature, dignity, objects, and general character of the science, with some exposition of the grounds on which the Bible is held to contain a revelation from God concerning himself; in other words, with a statement of the evidences of Christianity, and the proofs of the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures. In more modern systems of theology published on the continent, and especially in Germany, it is common, in order to exhibit a rigidly and minutely accurate method, and to follow out fully the idea that a system of Christian theology is just a systematic exposition of the information actually contained in or deducible from the Bible itself, to introduce a summary of the evidences of Christianity, and of the divine authority of the sacred Scriptures, under the designation of *prolegomena*, or *præcognita*, or *præcognoscenda*; while with that strong tendency to divide and subdivide by which the Germans especially are distinguished, they have given to this subject, viewed by itself and apart from its relation to systematic divinity, the special designation of apologetic theology, to indicate that it comprehends everything connected with the defence of the claims which Christianity and the Bible put forth to be received as coming from God. This naturally occupies the first place in a course of theological study, both because the question, whether

God has given a direct and supernatural revelation of himself to men, obviously occurs whenever men's thoughts are directed to the contemplation of God, and because it is only a conviction of the divine origin of Christianity and the Bible that will lead men to examine the Scriptures in a right spirit, and with right objects, and to make a right use of the information which they contain.

It has been common to divide theological science, or the whole of the subjects that ought to be embraced in a course of theological study, into four great branches—1st, Exegetical ; 2d, Systematic ; 3d, Historical ; and 4th, Pastoral Theology—each of which admits of being broken down into several subdivisions. This general division is sufficiently accurate, and may be usefully remembered and applied. We shall briefly describe each of these in the order now stated.

1. *Exegetical Theology.* The word ἐξήγησις from which the term is derived (coming from the verb ἐξηγῶμαι) just means explication or exposition, and this department therefore might be called explanatory or expository theology. It comprehends everything connected with the investigation of the exact meaning of the statements which compose the sacred Scriptures, and, of course, embraces a very wide range of topics. It may, without much straining, be regarded as comprehending Apologetic Theology, or the evidences of the divine origin of Christianity, and the divine authority of the Bible—1st, because right views of the origin, the authority, and the objects of the Bible, form not only reasons why it ought to be studied with the view of ascertaining its meaning, but do, or may, affect the way in which it ought to be explained and interpreted ; and 2d, because some knowledge of what is contained in the Bible, in other words some exegesis of its statements, is necessary before we can fully ascertain its general character and claims. This last idea of the necessity of understanding and interpreting the Bible before deciding upon its claims, origin, and authority, has been carried out so far by some writers as to have been made the ground of a proposed arrangement of theological study, by which the whole subject of the interpretation of Scripture occupies the very first place in the course, and is made to take precedence even of the consideration of the evidences of Christianity and the divine authority of the Bible. See Bishop Marsh's second preliminary Lecture to his valuable and useful work entitled *Lectures on the Criticism and Interpretation of the Bible*.

Assuming, what is undoubtedly true, that the materials for determining the credibility and authority of the Bible are partly, at least, derived from the contents of the Bible itself, he infers that the right arrangement of a course of theological study is that everything connected with the criticism of the Bible—*i.e.* the settling of the text, or the determining what are the Hebrew and Greek vocables which the inspired writers actually used, which constitute the Bible, and the interpretation of the Bible, or the explanation of its true and real statements—should be fully and minutely discussed and thoroughly mastered before we proceed to investigate its origin and authority. This arrangement is, perhaps, in strict logic correct, but for any practical useful purpose it is unnecessary. And it is unwarrantable on several grounds, and constrained. It seems to have been adopted by the learned bishop chiefly as a reason or ground for commencing his theological course, and occupying the principal share of his time in his labours as a professor of divinity, with that department of theological science with which he was best acquainted, and in which he took the deepest interest; for his theological course, so far at least as it has been published, did not go beyond this. There is no real necessity for a strict adherence to this order, while it is attended with much awkwardness and inconvenience. I presume you all feel that if you have not already studied the evidences of Christianity and the proofs of the divine authority of the sacred Scriptures, you ought to investigate them now before proceeding any further in your theological studies; and if you do so, you will assuredly find that there are sufficient materials for coming to a conclusion upon this subject, the discovery and application of which do not require any very minute or careful attention to the more recondite and difficult questions connected either with the criticism or the interpretation of the Bible. The various subjects comprehended under exegetical theology, in the wide sense in which it has been explained, may be arranged in the following order with sufficient attention to logical accuracy, and in a way corresponding with the natural and obvious train of thought likely to occur in a general survey of them.

- (1.) The evidence that the Bible contains a revelation of God to man, or what are commonly called the evidences of Christianity.
- (2.) The canon, or the consideration of what those books or writings,

to the exclusion of all others, are, by which God intended this revelation to be communicated to us, and which the Holy Ghost inspired for that purpose. (3.) The divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures, or the investigation of all that is involved in the position that the Scriptures not only contain or embody a divine revelation, but are themselves the word of God, and were produced by the agency of his Spirit. (4.) The general characters or properties of the Scriptures, such as their perspicuity, sufficiency, and perfection, by which they are fitted for the great purpose they were intended to serve, viz., to be the only rule of faith and practice. (5.) What is more strictly and properly exegetical theology, or the investigation of everything bearing upon the way and manner in which the Bible is to be used and applied, so that it may successfully accomplish this intended object; and this subject is now usually considered under two heads—1st, The criticism of the Bible, which by modern writers has been restricted to mean the investigation of the text, the settling of the true reading in the original languages; and 2d, The interpretation of the Bible, a much more important and extensive subject, and one which admits of several subdivisions, such as 1st, Philology, or a knowledge of the languages in which the Scriptures were written; 2d, Hermeneutics, or the science of interpretation, comprehending an investigation of the general principles and rules according to which the interpretation of the particular statements of Scripture ought to be conducted; and 3d, Exegesis, or the actual practice or exercise of interpretation.

It is very plain that every one who wishes to study theology, so as to be really acquainted with the science, must have some knowledge of all these topics; and that every one who aspires to the office of a minister of the word and an instructor of others, ought, if possible, to be familiar with them. They embrace a very wide and extensive range, affording scope for all diversities of talent, for the exercise of all your faculties, and for the application of all the knowledge and all the habits of investigation which you may have already acquired; and they are preliminary to that which ought to be henceforth the great business of your lives, the investigating and unfolding the whole mind and will of God revealed in his word for the salvation of men, and they thus form the necessary basis or substratum of all those labours and studies which it will

be your duty to prosecute, not merely while you are preparing for the work of the ministry, but also while you are engaged in the discharge of its duties, even until you enter upon that state where you will no longer see through a glass darkly, but face to face.

These subjects are all preliminary to the study of Christian theology in its more limited sense, as descriptive of the actual information given us in the sacred Scriptures, and to be received as resting upon God's authority, except, indeed, the subjects of the Inspiration and some others of the general qualities or properties and objects of the sacred Scriptures, with respect to which we have information given us in the Bible itself, which it will be needful for us to examine, and on which, after having established the general credibility of the Scriptures, it will be reasonable for us to rely. All these subjects now briefly stated are comprehended in the course which we must endeavour to traverse during the present session; and from their magnitude and extent, you will see at once how impossible it must be to treat any of them very fully, and what diligence and exertion and self-denial will be necessary on your part in order that, through God's blessing, you may all acquire a creditable acquaintance with them as the basis and groundwork of your future studies. As we will, of course, have occasion in trying to assist you in the study of all these important topics, to explain to you more fully their nature and importance, and their relations to each other, we shall not dwell longer upon them at present, but proceed to give a brief sketch of the general character and objects of the other leading divisions of theological science, that you may have some idea of the whole field, although, for the present session, you will not go beyond that portion of it which has already been marked out.

2. *Systematic Theology.* The next great division is what is commonly called systematic theology, while it is known also under the designations of dogmatic and thetic theology—the former name referring more to the form, and the two latter to the matter. It is just the truths or doctrines, the dogmata or theses taught or revealed in Scripture, in regard to all matters about which information is there communicated, arranged, or digested into a system. The Bible does not exhibit any systematic summary or classified digest of the truths which it reveals to us, and which we are required to believe upon its authority; and it is not difficult to

1 see something of the wisdom of such a plan in the composition of a divine revelation. The book of revelation, as it has been often remarked, is in this respect like the book of nature. In surveying God's works of creation, we find almost every object in a certain sense isolated and unconnected. On examination, however, we soon discover order in the midst of apparent confusion ; we discover resemblances and harmonies, relations and connections of various kinds subsisting among the innumerable objects presented to our contemplation, which lay a basis for systematising or classifying. This systematising and classifying of the numerous and diversified objects which the book of nature presents to us, on the ground of their resemblances and other relations, constitutes what is usually called science. It has afforded scope for the highest exercises of the human faculties, and has tended greatly to improve both the quality and the extent of our knowledge of the works of God. Just so it is in the book of revelation. Every particular statement contained in the sacred Scripture is just analogous to a single separate fact in the kingdom of nature. When its meaning is once fully established by the use of appropriate means, by a right use of the resources of hermeneutics and exegesis, it stands as an ascertained fact, a truth which God has revealed to us. But in the same book of revelation there may be, we find in fact in many cases there are, scattered up and down, if we might so speak, statements of a similar kind, relating to the same or similar subjects, which, when compared together, may throw light upon each other, and lead to important general conclusions that perhaps could not safely or warrantably or certainly be deduced from any one of them ; and at anyrate the knowledge and comparison of all these different statements may be necessary in order to our understanding the whole of what God intended to communicate to us, and therefore expected that we should understand and believe in regard to that particular subject. Systematic theology then just exhibits the classified result of the whole information given us in different statements and in various portions of the book of revelation, in regard to all the leading topics which are there brought under our notice. The process by which a system of theology may be formed is evidently quite a legitimate one. It should rest as its basis solely upon a careful examination and a correct interpretation, in accordance with the rules and by the use of the apparatus

of hermeneutics, of the particular statements of Scripture; and unless it rest upon this basis, it is of no more validity or value than the pretended natural science of the dark ages, which did not rest upon an accurate observation of the facts and phenomena of nature. But when the meaning of the particular statements of Scripture has been accurately ascertained in the right use of the appropriate means, there can be nothing wrong or illegitimate, nothing unreasonable or injurious, in comparing together the various passages which bear more or less directly upon the same subject, and deducing, from an examination of them all, the substance of what God meant to teach us upon the point, which however in his wisdom he has usually thought proper to teach us, not by formal abstract deliverances, systematically classified and arranged, but by a variety of statements more or less directly bearing upon the particular topic, and scattered to appearance indiscriminately, but in reality with divine and admirable wisdom, over the whole field of the word.

It has been no uncommon thing for a certain class of writers upon theological subjects to declaim against systematic theology, and against the works which are classed under the general designation of systems. This dislike of systematic theology and of systems has arisen from ignorance and misconception or unreasonable prejudice, and in some cases we fear from worse motives. A very large proportion of the systems of theology which, until the rise of infidel neology on the Continent about the middle of last century had been given to the world, were orthodox or Calvinistic, *i.e.* a large proportion of them gave generally, and in the main, a sound and correct summary of the leading truths contained in the word of God. And this was not by any means an accidental thing. The orthodox or Calvinistic scheme is the most systematic of all systems, possessing the beautiful consistency and harmony of truth, and deriving from its systematic consistency a presumption in favour of its soundness. On these accounts, a dislike of systematic theology, and a disposition to rail at systems and system-makers, has been with many little else than an indication of a dislike to Calvinism, and to the works in which the Calvinistic system was unfolded. And in so far as this dislike to systematic theology professed to rest upon reasonable considerations, it has usually been alleged that systems of man's making have a tendency to

supersede the word of God, and that the study of them tends to lead men to disregard the word of God as the only standard of truth, and to be less careful about ascertaining accurately the exact import of its statements. An exclusive devotion to system-making in theology, and the spending a great deal of time in perusing systems, may have some tendency to lead to this abuse. But the abuse may be guarded against, and will be guarded against, by the habitual recollection that the Bible is the only rule or standard according to which both our opinions and our practice ought to be regulated, and that we are to receive no truth or doctrine as a part of our creed merely because it is found in some esteemed system, and seems to be consistent and to fit in well with the other parts of it; and that men are bound to be satisfied themselves, and to be ever ready, if duly called upon, to shew to others, that all the theological opinions they entertain can be established by a rigid and exact investigation of the meaning of the actual statements of God's word. You are not called upon at the commencement of your theological studies to be devoting your time to the study of systems of theology, or of those works which usually pass under that name. There are preliminary topics with which, and with the works in which they are explained and illustrated, you ought in the first instance to be occupied. But even now you ought, according to your means and opportunities, to be acting as systematic theologians, or making a system for yourselves, *i.e.* you ought to be not merely studying the word of God for the purpose of ascertaining the precise and exact meaning of its individual statements, but classifying and comparing them, and endeavouring to form a clear conception of the general substance of the whole truth taught there in regard to all the leading subjects which are there unfolded. Indeed, the duty of making a system of theology from the word of God, based in all its parts upon an accurate examination of the precise import of its statements, is not incumbent only on those who study theological science for their own improvement, or with the view of becoming the instructors of others, but even on private Christians, on all who are desirous to make an intelligent and profitable use of the word of God. No man can be said to have made a right use of the word of God who has not deduced from it a system of theology, and so far acted the part of a system-maker, *i.e.* who has not derived from it

definite conceptions of the substance of the doctrines taught there concerning the character and moral government of God, the person and the work of Christ, the agency of the Holy Spirit, the natural state and condition of man, and the way of his restoration to the enjoyment of God's favour and to a meetness for heaven, and who is not able to give some explanation of the warrants and grounds in the sacred Scriptures for the views which he professes upon all these subjects. The crown and the keystone indeed of the study of theology as a branch of knowledge directed to the illumination of the understanding, and viewed apart from its bearing upon the formation of personal character and the attainment of personal salvation, is just the formation of a system of theology, *i.e.* the formation of distinct and well-defined and well-digested views upon the leading subjects revealed in the Bible; views which are really in accordance with God's revealed will, and which can be fully established by a correct interpretation of its statements individually and collectively. If the making of a system of theology from the word of God be thus important and indispensable, and if for this purpose it be necessary that men should prepare themselves by all appropriate means for an accurate investigation of the meaning of the statements of Scripture, and should be habitually engaged in interpreting it, it is of course right that at the proper time they should give some attention to the attempts which have been made by others to form a system of theology, or to set forth and expound the scheme of divine truth as unfolded in the sacred Scriptures—in other words, that they should read and examine some of the most approved works called systems, taking care to test them by a constant appeal to the word of God.

There are few comparatively, where Christianity is known, who are, in point of fact, left to form a system of theology for themselves from the sacred Scriptures, as the principles of some system or other are usually inculcated upon them at an early period of their lives. The Shorter Catechism is a system of theology; *i.e.*, it gives a systematic and connected exhibition of the principal doctrines taught in the word of God, both as to matters of opinion and of practice; and though you may have been instructed in the Shorter Catechism, and may have hitherto received its state-

ments without any very careful examination of their warrant in an exact interpretation of the statements of Scripture, yet you can be regarded as intelligent Christians, intelligent professors of an orthodox creed, only when you have gone over this ground with the word of God in your hand, and have satisfied yourselves that the system of theology which you profess to believe is really founded upon and derived from the sacred Scriptures, and are able to give some statements of the grounds of your belief to others. If this is necessary in an intelligent Christian, it is, of course, much more obviously necessary in those who aspire to be the instructors of others in the most important of all knowledge.

Systems of theology, all professing to give a connected exhibition and exposition of the principal truths of Scripture, may differ from each other in many respects, independently of that which constitutes the most important distinction among them, based upon the truth or falsehood of the representations they give of what the word of God actually teaches. The Shorter Catechism is, as we have said, a system of theology; the Confession of Faith is a system of theology; and a voluminous and elaborate work expounding the Confession of Faith, establishing all its positions from a minute examination of Scriptural statements, and defending them against the objections of adversaries, would also be described by the same designation. Some authors have distinguished systematic theology into *theologia catechetica* and *theologia acroamatica*, comprehending under the former name those briefer and simpler summaries of Christian truth which are intended for the young and those of weaker capacity, and are usually put in the form of question and answer; and under the latter those more extended and elaborate works which are composed of a series of dissertations or discussions upon the leading doctrines of Scripture. Any book discussing fully any one of the leading doctrines of Scripture may be said, in a sense, to be a work that may be classed under the head of systematic theology; but the term is usually restricted so as to include only those works which profess to give, more or less fully, a view of all the leading doctrines of God's oracles, and in this way to furnish an exposition, more or less complete, of all those great and infinitely important topics on the knowledge and belief of which men's salvation depends.

Systematic theology is sometimes ranked under the two heads of doctrinal or theoretic, and moral or practical theology, a distinction corresponding exactly to one with which you are familiar, under the heads of what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man; and though, as we have said, some writers use the terms dogmatic or thetic theology in the same extent of meaning as that expressed by systematic theology, it ought also to be mentioned that some writers use these terms of dogmatic or thetic, as comprehending only doctrinal or theoretic, as distinguished from moral or practical theology. There is a still more limited use of the words doctrine and doctrinal, as connected with this subject, that may be adverted to. We sometimes speak of the doctrine, worship, government, and discipline of the church, as distinguished from each other, and the distinction is necessary and useful; and yet worship, government, and discipline, *i.e.* the truths taught in the word of God regarding these matters, are of course comprehended under the general head of dogmatic or doctrinal theology, and form an important part of all the ordinary systematic works. God's word teaches certain *doctrines* or principles, in regard to the way in which the worship of the church of Christ ought to be performed, its government administered, and its whole affairs conducted; and the doctrines of God's word upon these points, as well as upon others, should of course be embodied in, and form a part of, any system of dogmatic or doctrinal theology. Where a distinction is made, as is sometimes necessary, between doctrine on the one hand, and worship, government, and discipline on the other, doctrine is then used as comprehending those truths of Scripture which bear more immediately upon the personal character and personal salvation of men individually, while the other divisions comprehend those truths, of inferior importance indeed, but still most valuable and necessary to be known, as revealed in the word of God, which unfold the character and constitution, and ought therefore to regulate the conduct, of the believers in revelation collectively, or of the church of Christ, viewed as a society or organised union.

LECTURE III.

DIVISION OF THE SUBJECT.

THEOLOGIA *polemica*, or *elenchtica*, of course means theology discussed in such a way as to communicate information concerning the controversies that have taken place in the church of Christ in regard to the various subjects that are unfolded in the word of God, and to convince of their errors those who hold unsound views upon any of these topics. The only legitimate weapons of theological warfare are those which are not carnal but spiritual—those which are fitted to impress the understanding and to affect the heart, and they ought to be employed in such a way as to prepossess and not to prejudice, to attract and not to repel, for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Erroneous views have been propounded and maintained upon every topic comprehended in Christian theology. The word of God, as the apostle informs us, was intended to be profitable for reproof and correction, as well as for doctrine and instruction, and that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work, it is necessary that he should be able to apply the word for the confutation of error as well as for the establishment of truth. As all the errors which have been broached upon theological subjects profess to receive countenance from Scripture, it is necessary, in our study of the Bible for ourselves, and in our exposition of it for the instruction of others, to have some respect to the object of convincing gainsayers, of shewing that their errors are founded upon the misinterpretation of Scriptural statements, and that the word of God, when rightly interpreted, establishes doctrines which are inconsistent with, and exclusive of, the errors that have been broached. Polemic or elenctic theology is just the systematic and connected application of the statements of Scripture rightly interpreted to the

confutation of error, and with this there is naturally connected the history of the controversies which have agitated the Christian church, and of the way and manner in which the leading doctrines of Scripture have at different times been assailed and detended; a subject which opens up a wide field of interesting study and investigation, but which belongs rather to historical than to systematic theology. Some of the great leading works on polemic theology, such as the valuable work of Turretine, follow the ordinary arrangement of the common works on systematic theology, and are chiefly occupied, under the various heads as they occur, with the confutation of the errors that have been broached in opposition to sound doctrine. Other works on the same general subject, and directed to the same object, such as Hoornbeek's *Summa Controversiarum*, and *Elenchus Controversiarum*, have taken up the leading controversies which have agitated the church, in chronological order, or on some other principle of arrangement, such as the Arian, the Popish, the Arminian, the Socinian controversies, and have combined a scriptural confutation of the errors, with a historical investigation of the circumstances connected with the rise and progress of the error, the discussions to which it gave rise, and the practical effects which resulted. While others again, such as Stapfer's *Theologia Polemica*, combine both these methods. There are some controversies, or rather errors or systems of errors, which, it may be under different names and aspects, have disturbed the church and injured the interests of religion from a very early period down even to the present day. With the history of these errors, and the best mode of applying the word of God to the confutation of them, every well-instructed theologian ought to be acquainted. It is true, indeed, that the degree of time and attention which it may be proper to devote to particular controversies, both scripturally and historically, should be regulated to some extent by a regard to the circumstances in which men's lot may be cast, and the condition of the church and the world at the time; and the circumstances under which *our* lot has been cast in providence, very plainly indicate that in so far as we may have the means and the opportunity of studying polemic theology, we are called upon to give special attention to the study of the Pelagian controversy, the Popish controversy, and the Prelatic controversy, understanding by the Prelatic controversy the

whole system of high-church heresies and errors, the prevalence of which, in our day, has so grievously injured and so deeply disgraced the Prelatic churches of this country.

Some writers have assigned a separate designation to a certain department of theological science under the name of *theologia symbolica*, which, however, like the *theologia polemica*, belongs partly to systematic and partly to historical theology. This name is derived from the Greek word *συμβολη*, which signifies either a joint contribution, or a bond of union, and which has been employed to describe the confessions and other standard books of particular churches, hence usually called *Libri Symbolici*. Symbolic theology, therefore, means an investigation into the Confessions and other standards or symbols of the different branches of the Church of Christ. Confessions of faith, authorised creeds and catechisms, and other symbolic books prepared, sanctioned, and set forth by particular churches, are just brief and compendious systems of theology professedly derived from the word of God, exhibiting the interpretation which the particular church adopting them has taken of the general tenor of Scriptural statement, and, of course, to be tried and examined like all other human compositions by the only unerring standard, the word of God. They are usually of more value than a system of theology prepared and digested by individuals, however eminent, for this reason, that they have been commonly prepared with more care, and subjected to a stricter scrutiny by a greater number of minds. And they are of more importance historically, as it may be supposed that they convey valuable indications of the state of the church which adopted them, and that they have also exerted a considerable influence upon the opinions of men. The history of the events connected with the formation of the creeds and confessions of different churches—and all this is comprehended under the head of *theologia symbolica*—forms one of the most interesting and important departments of ecclesiastical history, and is fitted to afford valuable instruction. What a light, for instance, is thrown upon the history of the Church of Rome, and upon many important topics in the Popish controversy, by Father Paul's history of the Council of Trent, where the principal symbolic books of the Church of Rome were composed; and who would not feel it to be both a duty and a privilege to become familiar with the history of that famous

assembly that was honoured of God to prepare those wonderful works which are still the symbolic books of almost all the Presbyterians who speak the English language, and who both in the old world and in the new include, we presume to think, the soundest and most important branches of the Church of Christ?

The Confessions of Faith of the Reformed Churches are the most important and valuable body of documents which have been given to the world since the apostolic age, and ought certainly to be examined at some period of their studies by all who wish to be acquainted with theological science. They are not so accessible in this country as they should be. The only collection of them which has been published in this country in modern times is called *Sylloge Confessionum*. It was published at the Clarendon Press at Oxford, and is not very complete. Much fuller and more complete collections of these Confessions have been published on the Continent, especially by Augusti and Meinerger. A translation into English of an old collection of the Confessions of the Reformed Churches—Hall's translation of the *Harmony of the Confessions*—has recently been published in this country, and this may serve some useful popular purposes; but in regard to documents where every word was carefully weighed, and where much may depend in investigating their meaning upon the precise terms employed, no one who is able to understand them in the original Latin should be satisfied with a translation.

The English language, though it contains many valuable works on particular doctrines and on separate subjects in systematic theology, contains comparatively very few systems; *i.e.* very few works in which all the leading doctrines of Christianity are arranged in systematic order, proved from the word of God, and their connections and relations pointed out. Systems of theology have been chiefly the productions of Continental writers, and are to be found principally in the Latin language,—one fact among many others of a similar kind, which establishes the necessity of students of theology acquiring the capacity of reading Latin with perfect ease and readiness. Systematic theology, however, has been always a good deal studied by Scottish Presbyterians; and indeed Bishop Burnet alleges that the Presbyterian ministers of the era of the Restoration had for their principal learning an acquaintance with the systematic writers of the Continent. No

one certainly could charge his Episcopalian friends with any great acquaintance with systematic writers; for in the Church of England the study of systematic theology has always been, and still is, grievously neglected. Calvin, Turretine, Maestricht, Pictet, Marckius, and Witsius, are the authors who have been most generally studied in Scotland as writers on systematic theology; and there can be no doubt that the study of the writings of these men has tended greatly to promote correct and comprehensive views of the scheme of divine truth. Hill's Lectures, and Dick's Lectures, two systems of theology recently published in our own country, are both highly respectable and valuable books, though their merits are of different kinds; but they are scarcely sufficient of themselves to render necessary any modification of the statement we have made, that the English language does not contain a great deal, *comparatively speaking*, that is of much value in the way of systems of theology. Let me again remind you, before leaving the subject, that the correct interpretation of the statements of Scripture is the basis of all sound theological knowledge, and that therefore the main business, the principal occupation, of all who have resolved to devote themselves to theological studies, should be the exegesis of the Bible, the constant and unwearied application of all appropriate means, of all the resources of exegetical theology, to the great object of ascertaining the exact meaning of the statements contained in the word of God. It is undoubtedly the duty of the student of theology diligently to compare the statements of Scripture together, not merely for the purpose of thereby ascertaining the meaning of the individual statements, but also of discovering and establishing the whole mind of God as revealed upon each topic; in other words, systematizing, or forming a system of theology. But it must not be forgotten that every attempt at system-making must be useless, and worse than useless, which is not regulated throughout by a constant appeal to Scripture as the only rule or standard, and that systems of theology, human compositions professing to give a systematic exposition of the contents of Scripture, are of no proper authority in themselves, and are to be followed only in so far as they are in accordance with the statements of Scripture correctly explained; that to make a system of theology, or to advocate and defend one, without having carefully investigated, and being able to

establish its soundness in all its parts from a correct interpretation of Scripture, is just as unreasonable as it would be to fabricate systems of natural science without having correctly ascertained, by observation and experiment, the facts and phenomena of nature ; is much more injurious to ourselves, by reason of the infinitely greater importance of the subject, and the greater guilt and evil of error ; and more dishonouring to God, as involving a refusal to make a right use and application of that word which he has magnified above all his works, and which is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

3. *Historical Theology.* This, of course, just describes an investigation of the events which have taken place in, or connected with, the church, or the propagation of true religion in the world, with the exhibition of the light which these events are fitted to cast both on doctrine and duty. A large portion of the inspired word of God consists of history ; and this fact of itself proves, what experience abundantly confirms, that history, rightly viewed and applied, is fitted to convey important religious instruction. The inspired histories contained in the Bible are intended, among other things, to shew us how the events which occur in God's providence ought to be viewed, and how they ought to be recorded. The events which constitute the history of the church and the world, whether recorded in sacred or in profane history, whether occurring in ancient or in modern times, are the Lord's doing, and are to be traced to the operation of his hand. In them all he has manifested his character and the principles of his moral government. He has been executing his decrees and effecting his purposes. The extent to which he may have been pleased, at sundry times and in divers manners, directly to reveal himself, or to interpose in an extraordinary and miraculous way, does not materially affect the real character of his agency and the great general principles which regulate it, though these special interpositions served some important purposes both temporary and permanent. We have no doubt that the inspired histories contained in the word of God are intended partly to be full-length exhibitions of the way in which God *always* governs the world, and that holy men were moved by the Holy Ghost to give us these histories in order that, having God's own account of some important departments of his providential dealings, we might apply the great general principles there

unfolded, at once to aid us in regulating our conduct and in estimating and applying aright what he has been always doing in the government of the church and the world, even where there was no admixture of miraculous interposition, and where there is no inspired history to assist us in the improvement we ought to make of the events observed or recorded. The account of the earlier portions of the history of our race and of the church—for under the name of the history of the church may be comprehended the whole of God's dealings with men bearing upon the subject of their salvation, from the fall of man and the first promise of a Saviour—is to be found only in the Old Testament, and it is a position which some authors, in proving the authenticity of the Bible, and particularly Bishop Stillingfleet, in the first book of his *Origines Sacrae*, have fully and formally established, that we have no other records of these periods of the history of the world which are entitled to credit, or on which reliance can be placed. But even in regard to the Old Testament history, there is information to be derived from other sources which ought not to be neglected, and which is fitted to cast light upon what is there made known to us. This is increasingly true as the inspired history descends to those periods when we have something like authentic history from Greek and Roman writers, as was the case more particularly in the age of our Saviour and his apostles. This, however, refers rather to the application of general history to the elucidation of the inspired histories contained in the Bible; while historical theology rather comprehends the history of the church itself. After God's revelation had been completed, after the scheme of divine truth had been fully unfolded, when the wall of partition had been broken down; efforts were made, in accordance with God's directions and under his special superintendence, for diffusing over the world the knowledge of the only scheme of salvation, when discussions arose about the meaning of God's completed revelation, and when the efforts for the propagation of divine truth and the controversies about its meaning and application exerted an important influence not only on the state of the church but of the world. All this is a most interesting and useful field of investigation, both in its connection with the fulfilment of scriptural prophecies, and as casting much light indirectly upon the import and use of scriptural truth, and affording useful lessons for the regulation of the

conduct of churches and individuals. But we do not presume to enlarge upon the importance and value of the study of ecclesiastical history, or the way in which the investigation of it ought to be conducted, for that subject is treated in this College by one¹ whose ability, judgment, and learning pre-eminently qualify him for the task. My object at present is simply to warn you at the commencement of your studies that in historical theology, or in the history of the church and of its doctrines, there is a wide and extensive field which you are called upon to traverse, from which important and useful lessons are to be learned, which it is at once dangerous and discreditable for a theologian or a minister of the gospel to be ignorant of, which it requires a good deal of reading and research to master, and which therefore at some period of your studies is well entitled to a considerable portion of your time and attention.

We have already had occasion to mention that polemic and symbolic theology belong partly to the department of systematic and partly to that of historical theology, as they are both of them connected at once with the systematic exposition of the scheme of divine truth contained in the sacred Scriptures, to be deduced from their statements, and to be tried by their authority, and with the facts or events relating to the prosecution of controversies, and the formation and adoption of creeds and confessions. There is a subject that may be fairly regarded as ranking under the general head of historical theology, though a distinct name and place has been sometimes assigned to it by theological writers, viz., Patristic Theology, or that which treats of the writings and doctrines of the Fathers. The Fathers, you are aware, is a name usually given to the Christian writers on theological subjects, who flourished in the early ages of the church. There is no very definite understanding as to how far down in the history of the church this name ought to be applied to the leading Christian writers, some classing under this designation ecclesiastical authors down till about the twelfth century, when the Fathers were succeeded by the schoolmen ; and others with more propriety restricting it to those who lived and wrote during the first six centuries of the Christian era. The general subject of patristic theology, including an examination of the authority or respect due to the opinions of the early Christian

¹ The late Rev. Dr Welsh.—ED.

authors, the benefits to be derived from the study of their works, and the way and manner in which they ought to be studied, interpreted, and applied, has at different periods been a good deal discussed among theologians. And the circumstances of the church in our day are such as to render it not unreasonable for students of divinity and ministers of the gospel to give somewhat more attention to the department of patristic theology than might have been necessary or expedient in the last generation. The fundamentals of sound theological knowledge, the necessary qualifications for a minister of the gospel becoming a workman that needs not to be ashamed, are at all times substantially the same. But the particular condition of the church, the views that may happen to be prevalent, or at least to occupy a considerable share of men's attention, may render it sometimes necessary for ministers to give a degree of study and consideration to particular departments of theological literature and science, that may not be in exact proportion to their permanent intrinsic importance. And on this ground it is right that ministers in the present generation should know something more of the Fathers, or at least *about* them, than it was in the last. All popish priests are sworn that they "will never receive or interpret Scripture except according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers." And hence the Fathers must always occupy a place of some importance in the popish controversy. Prelacy is based by some of its most able and learned defenders, exclusively upon the testimony of the Fathers, though it certainly derives no more countenance from the genuine writings of the earliest Fathers than it does from the word of God. And in the present day a body of men who are possessed of some talent and learning, and whose labours and writings have materially affected some branches of the Church, and have largely occupied the thoughts and influenced the opinions of men, have endeavoured to set up the Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries as the great oracles from whom the church of Christ ought practically to receive her faith in matters of doctrine, government, worship, and discipline. On all these grounds it is desirable in the present day that ministers of the gospel should acquire such a knowledge of patristic theology as may enable them intelligently to form and to vindicate sound views upon these subjects, and to take some part, according as they

may be called upon, publicly or privately, in defending the truth of God from the assaults which, through the Fathers, have been directed against it.

But it is not to be denied that, independently of these temporary and special grounds, there are sufficient reasons why at all times *some* degree of attention should be given to patristic theology. The writings of the Fathers are the sources of the history of the early church, and thus must always be an object of interest as well as a source of useful information. Every one feels that it is an object of most reasonable curiosity to know something of the views, character, and conduct of those who succeeded the inspired apostles of our Lord in the administration of the church's affairs, and we may reasonably expect to find in their works some materials for acquiring additional information concerning the history of the apostles themselves. The writings of the Fathers occupy an important place in the general argument establishing the truth of Christianity and the divine authority of the Scriptures, not as if we rested anything on their mere authority, or believed any doctrine ourselves, or called upon others to believe it, merely because the Fathers believed it, but because their testimony as witnesses establishes some points which cannot be established in any other way, and this upon ordinary recognised principles of evidence equally applicable to other authors similarly situated in relation to the points to be proved, and quite independently of any peculiar *authority* that may be claimed for them. The writings of some of the Fathers, although not many, are possessed of such intrinsic worth and excellence as, independently of any extrinsic or collateral considerations, entitle them to a perusal among other useful and valuable works in different departments of theological science. I would certainly regard it as indicating a want of enlightened interest in theological study, if you did not in the course of your studies take care to peruse the writings of the apostolic Fathers, *i.e.* those who lived with and immediately after the apostles; and it would probably neither be unreasonable nor unprofitable, if you had suitable opportunities, that you should peruse the principal writings of the Fathers during the first three centuries, concluding with the ecclesiastical history of Eusebius, which is the first regular history of the church during the early ages, and contains

a good deal of information upon this subject, for which we are indebted to him alone. To read the writings of the Fathers of course requires considerable familiarity with the languages, the Greek and Latin, in which they were written, although some of them have been translated into English.

A prodigious mass of literature has been collected illustrative of patristic theology, comprehending the history of the Fathers and of their works, discussions as to the genuineness and integrity of the writings ascribed to them, and as to the views which they collectively and individually entertained upon all the leading doctrines of theology. We have, for example, a very learned quarto by Daillé, a celebrated divine of the French Protestant Church, to prove that the short and not very valuable letters usually ascribed to Ignatius, one of the apostolic Fathers (whom some Episcopalians call Archbishop of Antioch and Primate of all Syria), are spurious; and we have another equally learned and still more bulky quarto by Bishop Pearson to prove, in opposition to Daillé, that these same letters are genuine. And were you to go fully into this question about the genuineness of these letters, and to read all that has been written upon it, it might probably occupy you for nearly half the session. The books which have been written on both sides of the question as to what were the views of the generality of the ante-Nicene Fathers, *i. e.* those who flourished before the Council of Nice in the early part of the fourth century, upon the subject of the Trinity, and upon all the leading points involved in the popish controversy, including church government, have been endless—voluminous almost beyond the possibility of being overtaken. With all this mass of matter, which may be comprehended under the head of patristic theology, it is not to be expected that students should be very familiar, because during the brief period usually devoted to theological study, they have many much more important matters to occupy their attention. But if any of you, after acquiring a creditable acquaintance with those branches of knowledge that are indispensable to a minister, should have inclination and opportunity to give particular attention to these topics comprehended under the *theologia patristica*, you would find it an interesting and useful occupation; and it is certain that in no department of theological literature will you find a greater number of works

written by men of the very highest ability and learning. It is an insult both to God and to men to hold up the doctrine of the Fathers of any age or period as the standard by which we ought to be guided, or as possessed of any authority over our opinions or conduct. It is insulting to God, because it virtually sets aside, or at least depreciates, his word, which he plainly intended to be our only standard, and which with divine wisdom he has fitted for that purpose; and it is insulting to men to ask them to submit to the authority of the Fathers, when it can be easily established that those men had not either collectively or individually anything about them to qualify or entitle them to exercise such authority, and that they differ so much from each other in the views which they hold, and in the interpretation which they put upon scriptural statements. Indeed there is no department of theological science with regard to which the Fathers were manifestly less entitled to respect and deference than that in which the Church of Rome has exalted them into an infallible and exclusive standard, viz., the interpretation of Scripture. For there cannot be a doubt that the early Fathers as a whole, and, speaking generally, were most miserable interpreters of Scripture; and there are very few books more useful in forming an estimate of the respect due to the Fathers than a treatise of Whitby's, entitled, "*Dissertatio de Sacrarum Scripturarum interpretatione secundum Patrum Commentarios*," in which he goes over the books of Scripture in order, and adduces upon all the leading passages some palpably erroneous, or ridiculously absurd, interpretations of them which have been put forth by some of the most eminent of the Fathers. Milton's general description of the Fathers: "Whatsoever time or the needless hand of blind chance hath drawn down from of old to this present, in her huge drag-net, whether fish or sea-weed, shells or shrubs, unpicked, unchosen, —these are the fathers."¹

It is altogether marvellous, and can be ascribed only to the agency and the extraordinary activity of the father of lies, that in our own age and country so many men of intelligence and learning, so many men holding the office of ministers in a Protestant church, so large a proportion of the young men educated at English universities, should have enslaved their understandings

¹ "Prelatical Episcopacy."

and their consciences to the Nicene Fathers, and should virtually call upon the churches of Christ to discard the word of God, and take as their rule and standard the doctrine and practice of the church in the fourth century. But this state of things does, nevertheless, make it the duty of ministers of the gospel, or at least of those of them who may have the means and opportunity, to acquire the more knowledge of Patristic theology that they may more fully understand the danger to which the church of Christ is at present exposed, and be able more completely to guard against it.

When this Tractarian movement commenced, its leading supporters were accustomed to allege that they were the only parties who could successfully encounter the Church of Rome; that there were certain great church principles, as they called them, which were true and sound, and could not be successfully controverted; that Protestants, or as the Tractarians at first called them, ultra-Protestants, denying these principles, could not grapple with Romish adversaries; whereas they, conceding them, and thereby, forsooth, taking up an impregnable position, were able to contend successfully against what they then called the Romish misapplication and abuse of them. When Tractarian church principles were once conceded, there was not a great deal in Popery worth fighting against, for they overturned the true standard of faith and the gospel method of salvation. But besides, the recent admission into the Romish church of the most able and consistent of the party, must have opened up even to men of the weakest capacity the futility of this pretence, and the real character and tendency of the movement. It is now sufficiently palpable that the whole Tractarian movement was a mere device of Satan to check the progress of evangelical religion, and to strengthen his great scheme for injuring the cause of Christ; and if there be any who still deny this, it is because, as a just punishment for their sinful opposition to the truth, they have been given up to strong delusion that they should believe a lie.

LECTURE IV.

DIVISION OF THE SUBJECT—ITS EXTENT.

4. *PASTORAL THEOLOGY*. This is the last of the four general heads into which theological science is usually divided, and, as its name imports, it includes the consideration of all those subjects which bear upon the execution of the functions of the pastoral office, and the right discharge of pastoral duty. The great object of your studies in this place, and the object also, I trust, of your fervent aspirations and your earnest prayers, is, that you may be fitted and prepared for becoming preachers of the word, ministers of the gospel, pastors of Christian flocks, and stewards of the mysteries of God, and that, through the right discharge of these duties, you may be instrumental in promoting the glory of God in the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints. By a respect to this end you should be habitually animated. The contemplation of this should impress you with a deep feeling of responsibility, and stir you up to the utmost zeal, diligence, and self-denial in the formation of your character, and in the improvement of all your opportunities. The main work of the gospel ministry, the chief occupation of all who devote themselves to the promotion of God's glory in the gospel of his Son, is to make known to men the will of God revealed in his word, to do this in such a spirit, in such a manner, and with such accompaniments, as may afford the best ground to expect that these labours will be successful; in other words, that God will make them instrumental in turning men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto himself. The first and fundamental thing therefore in contemplating the pastoral office is, that you do really and honestly desire to effect, or to be instrumental in effecting, the great objects which

the pastoral office was designed to effect, *i.e.* to promote the glory of God in the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints; that you be so desirous to effect this, and so impressed with its importance, as to be ready cheerfully to do and to bear all that may be needful, 1st, in order to a right preparation for the work, and then, 2d, in order to a right prosecution of it, that both now and afterwards you may be ready to endure hardness as good soldiers of Christ Jesus. And the next thing is, that you be well acquainted with the mind and will of God as revealed in his word, with the true scheme of divine doctrine there unfolded; that you may be able to expound it to others, and to afford them the most ample assistance in understanding and applying that word which alone is able to make them wise unto salvation. Hence the prominence given in your preparations for the ministry to the study of theology, *i.e.* all those subjects, exercises, and habits that may fit you for rightly understanding, interpreting, and applying the word of God, bringing out from it, and establishing by it, the will of God for men's salvation.

But the acquisition of the requisite knowledge by a man resolved to employ it for the glory of God and the salvation of sinners, is not the only thing needful in preparing for the work of the ministry. There are other topics bearing upon the work of rightly dividing the word of truth, and the other duties of the pastoral office; and the investigation of these, or the results of that investigation in the principles and rules which the word of God and the experience of his servants in all ages suggest as necessary and useful, constitute pastoral theology. The essential qualifications of a gospel minister, the ends he is bound to aim at, the kind of means he is to employ for the attainment of these ends, and the whole truth which he is to proclaim in God's name for the salvation of men, are to be found in and deduced from the sacred Scriptures; but as the minister of the gospel has to deal with men, with their understandings and their consciences, it is useful also to consider what, according to the constitution of man and the experience of the church, may contribute most to a successful discharge of ministerial duty, what are the lessons to be learnt with respect to the best mode of prosecuting the various branches of the work of the pastoral office, from the practice or the counsels of those whom in different ages and churches God

has most highly honoured in promoting his cause and advancing the spiritual welfare of men. The leading duties incumbent upon the pastors of Christian flocks are to preach the word, to administer divine ordinances, to labour more privately among the flock in the inculcation of the divine truth, and for the attainment of the same object to rule in Christ's house, *i.e.* to take part in the ordinary administration of the affairs of the church as a visible society established for certain ends, and to be regulated by certain laws. The great requisites for the right discharge of these duties are, as we have said, a right state of mind and heart, *i.e.* faith in Christ Jesus, or personal religious principle and right views of divine truth; but still the experience of God's servants, and the wisdom which from experience they have acquired, applied in connection with the word of God and in subordination to his authority, may afford useful assistance.

The first and leading branch of the pastoral office is the preaching of the word, and in addition to the great primary question of what it is that should be preached, *viz.* the truth of God as contained in the Scriptures, it is proper also to give some attention to the consideration how it ought to be preached. The apostle (2 Tim. ii. 1-5) plainly intimates that ministers who seek to become workmen that need not to be ashamed, must "rightly divide the word of truth," a statement which evidently implies that some skill and wisdom such as God approves of and may ordinarily be expected to bless, may and should be employed in disposing, arranging, and applying the truth of Scripture for the instruction of men, and adapting it, while ever the same in substance, as drawn from the same source, to the particular character, condition, and circumstances of those to whom it is more immediately addressed. This, therefore, is a subject deserving of attention, the analysis and synthesis, the compacting or the breaking down of the doctrines of Scripture, so as to make them most intelligible, impressive, and interesting to the hearers.

There are also general principles and rules applicable to preaching, derived from the consideration of the constitution and character of man, and therefore in some measure common to the preacher, with others whose duty or object it is to convince men's understandings, and to impress their hearts and consciences. The investigation of these principles and rules is sometimes spoken of

under the name of pulpit eloquence, or sacred rhetoric, or the art of preaching; names which are unbecoming, if not offensive, from their tendency to suggest the idea that the preacher of the gospel ranks in the same class as any other sort of orator, and that he expects success in the object he aims at—an object which can be effected only, in every instance and in every degree, by divine agency—from the enticing words of man's wisdom, from the ordinary causes and principles by which men's minds are commonly influenced in secular matters. But although those names are unbecoming, the subject which they describe is quite worthy of some degree of attention from those who aspire to be preachers of the gospel, viz. the investigating of these rules drawn from the principles of human nature, and the experience of God's most honoured servants, by the application of which the hearers of the word may be more certainly interested, persuaded, and impressed. The objects which the preacher ought to have in view can be effected only by the immediate agency of the Holy Ghost; but it is also true that the Holy Ghost employs at once the gifts and the graces of the preacher, and the natural faculties, capacities and sensibilities of the hearers, in effecting his own purposes of mercy; just as he employed the natural faculties and acquirements of men in the production of that word which is all given by inspiration of God, and which holy men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. It has been common to speak of the sacred Scriptures as containing the finest specimens extant of the various qualities which render human compositions the objects of admiration, specimens of poetry and oratory, pre-eminently distinguished as sublime, beautiful, and pathetic. And although this is but an insignificant circumstance, when viewed as a recommendation of that word which came from God, and is intended to make men wise unto salvation, yet the statement is true—it is a fact that the Scriptures do contain the finest specimens of poetry and oratory: this was done by God, it was intended by him, and has been employed by him, for accomplishing his gracious purposes. If the word of God given by inspiration has been so constructed as to address itself to the natural faculties and susceptibilities of men, to their reason, their imagination, and their taste, there can be no reason why the preachers of the word should not seek to improve and apply in their sacred calling any gifts they may possess

analogous to those exhibited by the inspired penmen of the Scriptures, or why they should not seek to gain for the truth a readier access to the understandings and hearts of men, by addressing themselves skilfully and judiciously to the capacities and susceptibilities of their hearers. One reason, though certainly not the only one, why our Saviour spoke so much in parables, was that he might convey instruction in a form and manner that might be fitted, according to our natural constitution, to tell most effectually upon the apprehensions and feelings of men, and there is nothing inconsistent with the profound reverence with which everything connected with the only begotten and well-beloved Son of God, whom the Father by an audible voice from heaven commanded men to hear, ought to be regarded, in saying that his parables are constructed with inimitable skill and beauty. The apostle Paul skilfully adapted his addresses to the circumstances in which he was placed, and the characters of those whom he addressed, and we can on several occasions discover in his addresses what might be truly characterised as consummate oratorical skill. This is true as a matter of fact connected with his addresses, and it is not inconsistent with another truth, viz., that in delivering them, he enjoyed the fulfilment of our Saviour's promise, "It shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall say." On these grounds we hold it to be quite right and proper that men, in preparing for the office of the ministry, should give some attention to what has been rather unhappily called sacred rhetoric, or the art of preaching, but what is usually called upon the Continent by a name less objectionable, because more vague and general, and less likely to suggest the ideas of management and contrivance, such as secular orators employ, viz., homiletics. This term is derived from the Greek word *ὁμιλία*, the term usually applied by the Greek Fathers to their popular expositions of Scripture and their ordinary pulpit discourses; and it just describes the system of principles and rules derived from the constitution of man, the study of approved models, and the experience of the church, by the application of which men may be guided in their preparations for the pulpit to such a mode of arrangement, representation, composition, and delivery, as may be best fitted to engage the attention and impress the understandings, hearts, and consciences of their hearers. Any attempt to introduce into discourses from the pulpit the mere

tricks and contrivances of oratory, composition, or delivery, is sinful and degrading, but an acquaintance with those great principles which, based upon the constitution of human nature and confirmed by experience, are ascertained to bear beneficially upon the great objects of instructing and impressing men in their special application to the pulpit, is not unworthy of some share of your attention. Method was the last of the four great divisions into which the old systems of logic, professing to instruct men in the right use of their faculties, used to be divided, and there can be no doubt that some acquaintance with the laws and rules of method must be highly useful to all who are called upon to labour in the inculcation of truth and in the instruction of mankind.

Another topic, comprehended under this general head of homiletics, but sufficiently important to be separately adverted to—and indeed on the Continent they have given it a distinct name, “catechetics”—is the adaptation of instruction to the young, and the principles by which this ought to be regulated. Ministers should give much attention to the instruction of the young, and in directing their attention to this important department of duty, it is not only warrantable, but necessary, to endeavour to apply those principles and rules, the adoption of which observation and experience have shewn to be naturally fitted to engage the attention and to influence the minds of the young. Ministers ought to take an interest in the promotion of general education, with the view of securing, so far as possible, that it be regulated by sound principles and brought under religious influences, that the youth may be trained up in the fear of the Lord, and that the school may become a nursery for the church. And for this reason, as well as to aid them in their own personal labours in the religious instruction of the youth of their flocks, it is right that they should make themselves acquainted with the principles of education and with the most approved systems of tuition.

Another department of pastoral theology is what is commonly called the pastoral care, or the consideration of the principles and rules by which the ministers of the gospel ought to be guided in the discharge of the more private duties of their office. In the more private as well as in the more public duties of the ministerial office, the indispensable qualifications are right motives, a due sense of responsibility, and a correct knowledge of the scriptural

scheme of truth; for the minister's great work in private, as well as in public, is just to explain, and enforce, and apply, the doctrines and duties of the word of God, and the different branches into which ministerial duty is commonly divided, such as the preaching of the gospel, the instruction of the young, the visitation of the sick, and ordinary visitation from house to house, are just based upon the different *circumstances* in which divine truth is to be explained and enforced, and the modifications in the modes and other accompaniments of the inculcation of it which these different circumstances may require or suggest. Instruction of the young and visiting the sick are, or should be, just explaining, enforcing, and applying divine truth, the revelation which God has given concerning himself; and in them, therefore, as well as in the public preaching of the gospel, the essential things are that we understand God's revelation, that we are able to unfold and apply it, that we are impressed with the objects for which this truth was revealed, are sincerely and ardently desirous that these objects should be promoted. But the difference of the accompanying circumstances, and of the immediate or proximate object to be aimed at in these different cases, renders necessary some difference in the mode of inculcating and applying the truth; and in regard to all these various departments of pastoral duty, important benefit may be derived from a careful and judicious consideration of their nature and objects, and from an examination of the history, experience, and counsels of those who have given most attention to these matters, who have been most largely endowed with spiritual wisdom, and who have been most signally blessed of God in their efforts for promoting the spiritual welfare of men. There is much in regard to the various departments of pastoral duty, and the way and manner in which they ought to be discharged, which can be learned only from the exercise of good sense and sound judgment upon the actual circumstances in which in providence you may be placed. But human nature is the same in all ages and circumstances; the great general principles by which men are influenced, and by which others ought to seek to influence them for their good, are the same; and, therefore, in regard to all the departments of pastoral duty, much is to be learned from careful meditation upon the subject, and from a study of the labours and experience of others.

There is one other department of pastoral theology to which the authors who have written upon this subject have assigned a separate designation. It is that which professes to explain the principles by which the government of the church ought to be regulated, and it is commonly called ecclesiastical jurisprudence. The constitution of the church, as laid down in Scripture, of course forms a department in dogmatic or doctrinal theology, and the subject also enters largely into polemic theology. The proper law for regulating the administration of the affairs of the church of Christ is to be found only in the word of God, and its great leading principles are plain and simple. But as it is only the widest and most general principles upon the subject that are laid down or indicated in Scripture, much discussion has taken place, and many regulations have been adopted, at different times and by different churches, as to the way and manner in which the various questions and classes of questions which have arisen in the actual administration of ecclesiastical affairs, ought to be decided or disposed of. Most churches have thought it necessary or expedient to have, besides their creeds and confessions exhibiting the summary of doctrine which they regarded as sanctioned by the word of God, canons or codes of discipline laying down rules or regulations as to the best way of disposing of the various questions that must be continually arising and calling for decision wherever a church of Christ is in full operation. These canons or codes of ecclesiastical discipline have usually professed to be derived from the Bible, in so far as it contains materials bearing upon this subject, and from the principles of natural justice and equity, applied to the particular subject under consideration. They have often occupied a degree of the attention of churches much greater than their necessity and their intrinsic importance demanded. Still it is true that the head of ecclesiastical jurisprudence embraces the discussion of some questions of no little importance. It has occupied a place of considerable prominence in the general history of theological literature. Occasions and emergencies from time to time occur in the history of churches on which a familiar acquaintance with the principles and history of ecclesiastical jurisprudence is important and useful, if not indispensably necessary; while it is obviously a matter of obligation on the part of ministers to acquire that knowledge of the constitution and discipline of their own churches

which may be necessary for the right discharge of the duties that may devolve upon them in regard to the ordinary administration of ecclesiastical affairs. We have eighty-five Canons and eight books of Constitutions, which profess to have been compiled by the apostles, and which have been held up by some writers of the church of Rome as genuine and authentic. They are undoubtedly the compilation of a subsequent age, but they give interesting and curious information concerning the government and discipline of the early church, and have been to some extent the basis on which the canons and discipline even of the most Protestant churches have been founded. Most of the early councils of the church passed canons in regard to discipline and the administration of ecclesiastical affairs, as well as gave decisions upon questions of doctrine, and these canons were the basis of the more ancient portion of the canon law, the ecclesiastical law of the church of Rome. And although Luther publicly burned the canon law, and although it contains a great deal of Popish corruption, a great deal both of doctrine and regulation fitted to introduce and establish an antichristian tyranny over the minds and consciences of men, yet as it also contains a large portion of what undoubtedly formed the discipline of the early church, and has exerted no small influence upon the ecclesiastical discipline of all the Protestant churches, its contents and its history are worthy of some degree of attention from those who wish to possess an acquaintance with all the leading departments of theological literature, and to be thoroughly fitted for the discharge of those duties that may devolve upon them as office-bearers of the church. Such is a brief sketch of the leading divisions into which theological science is commonly divided, and such the range of topics which it comprehends.

This sketch, however, gives a very faint impression of the extent and magnitude of the work on which you have entered, just because it is much too vague and general to convey any vivid impression. Were we to take any one of the leading divisions and to fill up somewhat more in detail the skeleton we have exhibited, as, for example, exegetical theology, and to present to you a statement of all that was needful in order to a correct and rightly principled interpretation of the Scripture, the extent of the necessary materials, the precise nature of the process to be pursued, and some of the leading books to be read and mastered, as we may

afterwards have occasion to do, you might probably have a more distinct conception of the extent of the field, and of the magnitude of the objects which it embraces. But enough has perhaps been said in this very brief and general sketch for my present purpose, which is principally to impress you with such a sense of the extent and magnitude of the work that lies before you, as may lead you to cherish a due sense of the responsibility attaching to the way in which you now spend your time and exercise your faculties, and to constrain you to form the resolution, depending upon God's grace, that you will gird up the loins of your minds, and that you will devote your utmost energies and the most strenuous and persevering application to the studies on which you are about to enter. These studies, indeed, should not be confined to the brief period of your attendance at this college, but should continue during your lives ; but there is a certain amount of acquaintance with all these different topics, without which no one ought, in the present condition of the church, to be admitted to the office of the ministry, and it is most important that a right basis should now be laid for your future labours in extending your knowledge. And the greater the probability is that you may be, at no distant period, engaged in the work of the ministry, and may then have numerous and urgent demands upon you for active exertion, the more necessary is it that, during the prosecution of your theological studies, your time should be faithfully and conscientiously devoted to the work of preparation. It may not be unreasonable or improper that, during your future lives, while engaged in the work of the ministry, you may, if circumstances admit of it, give special attention to some one department or other of theological science, according to the bent of your faculties and inclinations, the books which you have an opportunity of studying, and the state of the church and the world in the sphere where your lot may be cast. This, within certain limits, may be right and reasonable, provided you never neglect the one paramount object of studying the word of God, and accurately ascertaining its meaning. But in the meantime it is indispensable that you all go through the same course, and all strive to acquire that amount of knowledge of theological science which every minister of the gospel ought to possess, and that you seek to be impressed with those principles, and trained to those habits, which may prepare you for the permanent prosecution of theological

studies. No one can be considered a theologian, or qualified to be a minister of the gospel, unless and until he has read much and thought much, acquired a considerable amount of knowledge from the reading of books, and brought his powers and faculties to bear in all their strength and energy upon the various topics to which his attention may have been directed.

In directing your attention to the consideration that from the vast extent of theological science and the number of different subjects it embraces, there is required much laborious study before you can become theologians, it is right to warn you against a temptation to which some of you might be exposed upon this subject, that, viz., of dissipating your time and even injuring your faculties, by the indiscriminate perusal of a great number of books. The extent of theological literature is so vast, the number of works that have been produced upon theological subjects by men of the highest talents, learning, and celebrity is so great, that students who have access to libraries are in some danger of being tempted to become mere devourers of books, without prosecuting a regular plan of study, or giving due time and attention to digesting the books they read, or seeking to exercise their own judgment, or to form their own opinions upon the various subjects which their reading may bring under their notice. This practice is unfavourable to the culture of the mental powers, which ought to be one object of all our studies, and it does not in the long run tend to promote the acquisition of any knowledge that is really valuable. A mere devourer of books will never become really skilled in any science, and will not be able to apply the knowledge he may have acquired to any really useful purpose. And there is perhaps scarcely any science where students are more strongly tempted than in theology to indulge in a wide range of indiscriminate and miscellaneous reading, without giving due attention to regulate their reading upon a systematic plan, and to exercise their powers of judgment and reflection upon the subject of their reading. Luther was accustomed to say that there were three things that were necessary to make a theologian, viz., prayer, meditation, and temptation or experience. Under the head of meditation he, of course, comprehended reading, to which the apostle enjoined Timothy to give attendance, but by including it under the head of meditation he shewed very emphatically the strength of his con-

viction that it was not the mere perusal of books that was in itself of any very great value, unless men's faculties were really brought to bear upon the subjects of the books read. There must be reading, much reading, but this reading must not be the mere devouring of books, it must be accompanied with such a careful weighing and digesting of what is read, that it should rather be called meditation than reading. There are two errors upon this subject to be guarded against—First, indiscriminate reading of whatever theological books may happen to come in your way, or may be most agreeable to your inclination; and second, mere reading, unaccompanied in due measure with meditation and reflection. You are not to imagine that it would be warrantable or safe for you to plunge without premeditation or system into the immense ocean of theological literature, following wherever accident or fancy might lead you. At a subsequent period of your lives you may perhaps (as we have said) be more at liberty to gratify your inclination in selecting some particular department of theological literature, and giving it a prominent place in your ordinary studies. But during the period of your attendance in this place, in the prosecution of what is technically called the study of theology, you have distinct and definite objects which you are bound to aim at, and to accomplish, and must therefore adopt and follow out a definite plan. You must during your theological studies acquire a respectable acquaintance with theological science in its leading departments; and this can be fully secured only by first of all getting some general notions of its leading divisions, and their connection with each other (such as we have endeavoured to lay before you), and then following out some regular plan in prosecuting the study of them, based upon a right view of their mutual relations, and sufficiently comprehensive to include everything of primary importance, and especially everything indispensable to a creditable preparation for entering upon the work of the ministry.

It would be a very easy thing for you to spend the whole of the four years of your studies in reading curious and interesting works, even in some one department of theological literature, while yet you had acquired little substantial, useful, practical knowledge of theology, and might be ignorant of many things which it would be disgraceful for a minister not to know, and ignorance of which

would, in a great measure, render you disqualified for the office of the ministry. Of course you are to presume (unless there be very clear evidence to the contrary) that the subjects brought under your notice by your instructors at the different periods of your progress in your studies, in the successive years of your attendance in this place, are those which, for the time, should mainly occupy your thoughts, fill your minds, and regulate your course of reading. And whether you are reading books or listening to instructions, you must not neglect meditation, letting your mind dwell upon what you read and hear, until you see it clearly and comprehend it fully, until you have clearly apprehended its foundation and its bearings; in short, until you have so fully digested it, that it has become a part of your own intellectual provision, or rather until the views which may have been brought before you by reading or hearing on all questions of importance are clearly discerned, both in their meaning and in their evidence, are admitted as a portion of those convictions which you firmly hold and can intelligently defend, or are deliberately rejected, as not sanctioned by the word of God,—the only source of sound doctrine, the only standard by which your views as theologians, and your whole conduct as ministers of the gospel, ought to be regulated. The necessity of combining reading and meditation, or reflection, is thus happily expressed by a celebrated writer, Gerhard John Vossius, the father of the equally celebrated Isaac Vossius:—"Omnino igitur lectio et meditatio arctissimo societatis vinculo colligari debent. Mera enim lectio non penetrat in animum; siquidem attentione opus est in legendo, et ubi legeris, meditatione, cur quidque dicatur, cur sic potius quam aliter, et quomodo lecta ad res similes possimus transferre. Sine istis, quod legitur non satis intelligitur, et minutum illud quod capitur, eo quod radice careat, non facit fructum. Immo facile ejus subibit oblivio, quomodo quæ non alte inhærent solo, fere vento auferuntur. Ut mirandum non sit, si sæpe lectionis multifariæ homines, exigui sint judicii, et pæne nullius. Nimirum hoc inde est, quia memoriam onerant, judicium non acuunt vel exercent. Sed ut hac parte delinquant complures librorum helluones, qui multa vorant, nulla concoquunt, ii in contrarium peccant qui, alienis laboribus contemptis, assidui sunt in meditando, et quia aliena nesciunt, quæ multis plurimum partibus sunt veriora melior-

aque, sua toties somnia amplectuntur pro oraculis.”—(Gerhard Vossius, quoted in *Buddæi Isagoge*, p. 89.)¹

¹ “Reading and meditation ought to be very closely and intimately combined ; for even reading does not penetrate into the mind, there being a necessity for attention while reading, and for meditation after it, that we may perceive the reasons and grounds of the particular statements made, and be able to apply what we read to other things of a similar kind. Without this what is read is not understood, and the small portion that may be comprehended will produce no fruit, because it has no root. It will also soon be forgotten, just as we see that what is not fixed deep in the earth is generally carried away by the wind. So that it is not to be wondered at that men of extensive and multifarious reading are sometimes possessed of little or no judgment. The reason is, that they merely load their memories, and do not sharpen their judgment by exercising it. But as many ‘helluones librorum’ err on one side, devouring much and digesting nothing, so they err in an opposite extreme who, despising the labours of others, spend their time wholly in meditation, and because they are ignorant of what others have written, though much more true and excellent than anything they could produce, they often embrace their own dreams and fancies for oracles.”



LECTURE V.

PRAYER, MEDITATION, AND TEMPTATION.

WE have had occasion to advert to Luther's well-known position that it is prayer, meditation, and temptation that contribute to make a theologian, and we have explained to you the nature of meditation, as well as given you a brief outline of the vast field of topics on which this meditation, implying as it does the vigorous and steady exercise of all your powers and faculties, is to be exercised. Luther places prayer first, and this was nothing more than is justly due to its paramount importance; it is the imperative and primary duty of all who desire to become acquainted with theology, and qualified for the office of a minister of the gospel, to abound in prayer and supplication. It is quite true that men without piety and without prayer may read many theological books, that God may uphold and sustain them in the ordinary exercise of their faculties when directed to these objects, as when directed to any others, and that they may thus acquire a large measure of acquaintance with theological topics, and be able to discuss them and dispute about them. It has often been remarked, and the remark is undoubtedly true, that many men have written ably and convincingly in defence of the truth of the Christian revelation, in opposition to the attacks of infidels, who never understood or comprehended the leading truths contained in the revelation which they proved to have come from God, and who of course derived no real permanent benefit from the revelation which God had given them. It is a truth clearly revealed to us in Scripture, that no man ever really attains to any such knowledge of God's revealed will as will be available for his own personal salvation, or warrant him in entertaining the expectation of being instrumental through the truth in promoting

the salvation of others, except through the direct agency of the Holy Ghost. The agency of the Holy Spirit in convincing men savingly of the truth of God's revelation, and in enabling them to understand its meaning, we shall have occasion afterwards to consider. But in the meantime, we assume it as true, as the basis of our exhortation to you to accompany the whole of your theological studies with a spirit and habit of earnest prayer for the illuminating influences of the Holy Ghost. The truths upon the subject which ought to be most deeply impressed upon your minds, and which ought to be constantly remembered and applied, are just these: 1st, that all really useful and valuable knowledge of theology, or of God's revealed will, must come from God himself; 2d, that God imparts this knowledge in connection with the study of his word, and the other means of grace, through the direct agency of the Holy Ghost, the third person of the Godhead; and 3d, that prayer is the direct and appropriate means which God has appointed and promised to bless, for drawing down upon us the influences of the Holy Ghost. If these truths are duly impressed upon your minds, and if along with these convictions you have a real, sincere, and permanent desire to know God's revealed will, with a view to the great practical ends which this revelation was intended to serve with reference to men, collectively and individually, then the natural, the necessary result will be, that you will abound in prayer and supplication for the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit, that you will earnestly and importunately seek his guidance and direction with reference to the whole of your studies, to every book which you peruse, every topic to which your attention is directed, and every attempt you make to investigate the meaning of any portion of his word. You have all been taught, and the teaching was in full accordance with the sacred Scriptures, that "prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will";¹ and if you have at all rightly apprehended this truth, you must have seen, that in the discharge of this duty, or in the exercise of the privilege of prayer, everything depends upon the existence in your hearts of a desire to obtain something from God, which desire you offer up to him, from a conviction that he is able and willing to grant it, and that offering it up to him is the best and most certain means of having

¹ *Shorter Catechism.*—ED.

your desires accomplished. The first thing to be attended to then is, that you have in this matter a desire agreeable to God's will. God will have all men to come to the knowledge of the truth, and therefore every honest desire directed to the attainment of a knowledge of his revealed will, may be properly offered up to him in prayer.

That the desire of theological knowledge be really agreeable to God's will, and therefore a suitable basis for acceptable prayer, it must be founded upon right views of what divine truth is, and of what are the objects which it was intended by God to serve. Theological knowledge is in itself a good thing, and therefore ought to be desired. But it may be desired from unworthy or selfish motives, or without the presence and influence of those considerations that *should* lead men to desire it, and either of these circumstances would vitiate the whole state of mind out of which the desire proceeds, and which truly determines its whole moral character—its agreeableness to God's will. The apostle says, "He that desireth the office of a bishop (or pastor), desireth a good thing." The episcopate or pastoral office is therefore in itself a good thing, and a proper object of rightful desire; but if a man desire the office of a bishop, not from a real and honest regard to the true nature and proper ends of the Christian ministry, but influenced by a regard to filthy lucre, to power, influence, reputation, love of literary ease, or any consideration derived merely from the contemplation of things seen and temporal, and not from the great spiritual and eternal results which the ministry was designed to be instrumental in effecting, then the desire, however strong and powerful, becomes vitiated and sinful in its character, as proceeding from and indicating a state of mind inconsistent with the requirements of God's law, and in opposition to his revealed will. In like manner the desire of theological knowledge, the wish to attain those qualifications, or some of them, usually required before men are admitted to the ministry, may originate in mere love of knowledge as a means of intellectual exercise and cultivation, in a regard to wealth, or power, or fame; and then the state of mind, the originating motive which gives the moral character to the desire, is sinful and offensive to God. The desire of theological knowledge, of an acquaintance with God's revealed will, is only then right and acceptable when it is founded upon right views of

what God's revealed will is, and of what the purposes are which it was intended to effect ; in one word, when this desire of knowledge originates in a previous intelligent desire to realize, or attain to, or to be instrumental in promoting, the great ends for which God made known his will to men.

And in this way, under the head of prayer, which is an offering up of desires, there may be comprehended the consideration of the whole motives by which men are induced to engage in theological study, and in preparing for the work of the ministry. The motive by which men should be led to engage in theological study is a real desire to attain to the knowledge of God's revealed will, and the grounds of reason of this desire, the causes that produce it, and keep it in strong and vigorous exercise, should be right views of its nature, excellence, and objects, as coming from God, as making him known to us, and as communicated by him to men, in order that they, through the knowledge and belief of it, may be saved from eternal misery, and enabled to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever. It is because theology, as taught in the word of God, is possessed of this character, and intended to be the means of effecting these results, that you should desire the knowledge of it. And as candidates for the office of the ministry, you should seek and desire the knowledge of it, not only for your own salvation, but in order that, devoting your lives to the making it known to others, you may become the instruments of saving the souls of your fellow-men. A desire to attain to a full knowledge of God's revealed will, and generally to acquire all the qualifications necessary for entering upon the work of the ministry, originating in such views as these, clearly apprehended, and deeply impressed upon your hearts, will ever be accompanied with profound humility, with a deep sense of responsibility, and with a firm determination to be unwearied and persevering, to spare no pains, and to shrink from no sacrifice, in the use of all the means by which the necessary knowledge may be acquired, and the due qualifications may be secured. And the first and most indispensable of all requisites is, that you have such a desire, founded upon such views and considerations ; and whenever this desire becomes at any time weak and languid, you are to seek to have it strengthened and invigorated by meditation upon the value of divine truth, and the preciousness of the salvation of souls. When this desire

has been really called forth in your hearts—and without it your labours and studies in acquiring theological knowledge cannot be expected to lead to any important practical results, but only to harden your hearts and prove offensive to God—then you will feel constrained to offer it up to God in prayer, under a conviction that he alone can gratify it, and animated by the assurance that he has promised his Holy Spirit to them that ask him. If all your studies, and especially all your attempts to ascertain the meaning of the statements of God's word, are not accompanied by fervent prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the inference is irresistible, either that you do not really desire to become savingly acquainted with divine truth for your own benefit and that of others, or else that you do not really believe that God alone can bestow this knowledge, and that he usually gives it in answer to prayer. And it is most proper that, in connection with this topic, you should examine carefully into the state of your hearts, and into the motives which have led you to engage in a course of theological study, the desires by which you are animated in the prosecution of it, and the objects which you have in view. Without right views and deep impressions of the origin and source, the character and objects of theological truth, you can have no right and well-principled desire to acquire the knowledge of it, and without such a desire existing in your heart, and distinctly recognised and felt there, you can present no sincere or acceptable prayer to God for the enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit.

Where no desire exists in the heart, of course it cannot be offered up; and where a desire for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is not offered up, there is no reason to expect that the Spirit will be given. If you are not yet aware that a useful and really valuable knowledge of theology must come from the Holy Spirit, and is usually given in answer to prayer, you are still ignorant of the first principles of God's oracles; and if you have no real and ardent desire to get this knowledge, and are not ready and resolved to abound and to persevere in the use of all the means which may contribute to the attainment of it, then your attendance here is a mockery, it is a hypocritical profession which does not correspond with the actual state of your hearts; and in that case it would be much safer and more expedient for you to direct your attention to some other object of pursuit. Your prayers thus become tests of

your character and motives—plain indications of the real desires that exist in your hearts, and of the objects which you are really aiming at. Although a desire to have the enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit is the only right basis, and will prove the only efficient source of prayer for his outpouring, yet it is to be remembered that the desire must not only exist, but must also be offered up. Men are very apt to deceive themselves in regard to the state of their hearts, and the character of their desires and affections. They are not naturally inclined to pray, and you must beware of being satisfied with any other evidence of the existence and strength of that desire, under the influence of which you profess to be acting, except the fervency and the frequency with which you offer it up to God in prayer. There may be other causes which may interest you in the studies in which you are about to be engaged, and may induce you to pursue them with some degree of ardour and eagerness, such as the mere pleasure arising from the pursuit of knowledge and the study of the works of men eminently distinguished for ability and learning, or a determination to make a creditable preparation for the duties of the profession which you have chosen for life; but in so far as your prosecution of theological study arises from any of these motives, you will not be led to much fervent prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, even though you may be willing to admit in words that his influence alone can make you successful. It is only a desire of theological knowledge, based upon those views and motives which we have described, that will lead you to abound and to persevere in prayer for the effusion of the Holy Spirit; and if you are not fervent and frequent in your prayers for his guidance, it is the plain dictate of common sense and prudence that you are not yet influenced by a sincere and intelligent desire that God by his Spirit would guide you into all truth. You are not then to infer that you have a desire for theological knowledge of the right kind, based upon right views, unless you are habitually praying for the guidance of God's Spirit; and you may be assured that during the whole of your theological studies, which ought to last during your lives, the restraining of prayer, a disposition to neglect or disregard this exercise, or to perform it carelessly or perfunctorily, may be regarded as marking at once a declension in your spiritual vigour and activity, and also a dimi-

nished proficiency in the acquisition of really valuable professional knowledge. I am not at present discussing the subject of prayer as an article in the scheme of Christian doctrine, and therefore will make no attempt to prove to you its value and importance, or endeavour to explain to you how it may be expected to operate beneficially in promoting your progress in your studies. I *assume* that you profess to believe these great truths on which at once its obligation and its efficiency are founded, and would most earnestly entreat you to take care that this duty be never neglected or carelessly or perfunctorily performed; that any symptoms of negligence or indifference upon this point in your own feeling and practice may awake in you instant jealousy and alarm, constrain you to repair to God's throne with deeper fervency and more earnest importunity than ever, and lead you to meditate more deeply upon those views which may impress upon you a sense of your own ignorance, helplessness, and dependence upon God's Spirit; of the infinite value of divine truth, the ends for which it was made known, and your obligations to pursue them; and then you will assuredly be led to pray, and to pray aright, for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost to guide you into all truth. Let it be ever deeply impressed upon your minds that if you have not those spiritual influences which are necessary to guide you into all truth, to prepare you fully for the work of the ministry, the adequate and comprehensive explanation of your deficiency is to be found in this—it is "because you ask not, or because you ask amiss;" and let this consideration be applied by you at once to deepen your sense of your own responsibility for your ignorance and your shortcomings, and at the same time to encourage you to greater fervency and importunity of prayer, and to a more diligent use of all the means on which the blessing of God is asked and effected. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him" (James i. 5).

The third thing, according to Luther's enumeration, which is necessary, in addition to prayer and meditation, to make a theologian, is temptation or experience, or the practical application of divine truth in the way of guarding against evil tendencies and results. We may have occasion at a future period of your studies to explain to you more fully this element—the qualifications or

exercises of a theologian or a minister of the gospel; but it is right that even now you should understand its meaning; as it may be useful even now that you should have some regard to the acquirement and use of it. The great duty of a minister of the gospel is to explain, enforce, and apply divine truth as contained in the sacred Scriptures, in order that by the agency of the Spirit through the instrumentality of the truth, men may be first of all turned from darkness to light, and then thereafter enabled to die more and more unto sin, and to live more and more unto righteousness. It is of course assumed as indispensable that those who devote themselves to the proclamation of divine truth for this purpose, have themselves experienced its converting and regenerating power, that they are recommending that to others, the efficiency of which they have tried and experienced themselves, in changing their natures and turning them to God, by leading them to embrace Christ, and which they are still employing for leading them to die more and more unto sin, and to live more and more unto righteousness. Now, this work, in which every man who can be regarded as justified to be the spiritual instructor of others ought to be engaged—that of mortifying and subduing sin in his own members—is attended with some difficulties, *i.e.* there are temptations which stand in the way of his prosecuting this work with due zeal and activity and perseverance; and one exercise, therefore, in which he ought continually to be engaged, is applying the truths which he has been taught by the Spirit to resist these temptations, and to prosecute the work of going on from one degree of grace to another. The habit and exercise of applying divine truth for resisting temptation and growing in grace is indispensable to every believer, to every one who has really entered upon the way to Zion. But at present we are called upon specially to notice that it tends greatly to promote and extend men's real knowledge and intimate discernment of divine truth, and to aid them unspeakably in rightly dividing it, or applying it wisely or judiciously for the benefit of others. And it was this, whose necessity and importance Luther enforced under the name of temptation, as one of those things essential to make a theologian or a minister of the gospel. You can have no thorough and intimate acquaintance with divine truth, and especially you will be very ill fitted to explain and apply it for the

benefit of others, unless you have had some practice in actually bringing it to bear upon the resistance of those temptations with which all believers are assailed in their journey towards Zion. All the principal truths revealed in Scripture are intended to be instrumental in leading men—those to whom they are made known—to receive Christ Jesus the Lord, and thereafter to walk in him, in opposition to all the obstacles which the devil, the world, and the flesh may interpose. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit, and is continually to be employed in the spiritual warfare; and the man who has not had the benefit of temptation in the sense in which we have explained it, is like one who has learned the use of the sword only from written instructions, without having tried to handle or to wield it, and who, of course, is still very unfit for defending himself against the assault of enemies, and still more unfit for instructing others in the art of self-defence.

The whole doctrines of God's word have a practical tendency; they have all been revealed to us for practical objects, and they should be all employed for producing practical results. A man cannot be said to have a full and adequate knowledge of what God has revealed in his word unless he has made some practical application of it to its intended objects, unless he has not only formed some notion or conception of it, but actually tried the use of it. A man who has purchased a book may be said, in a certain sense, to have in his possession the knowledge which the book contains. The book lies on his table, and he can, when he chooses, take it up and read it, but he does not possess, in any proper sense, or to any valuable purpose, the knowledge which the book contains, until he has made use of his possession of it, by reading and digesting it, until he has applied it to its intended purpose. So in like manner, no one can be said fully to know and comprehend the truths revealed in God's word, until he has not merely acquired some notions about them, but actually begun at least to apply them to the great practical purposes which they were intended to serve, in enabling those within whose reach they have been brought to resist temptation, to mortify sin, and to go on to higher attainments, in conformity to the image and will of him who revealed them. This process of actually applying the word of God and the doctrines which it contains to their great practical purpose in the formation of character and in the regulation of conduct, according

to the actual circumstances in which men are in providence placed, and the temptations they are called upon to encounter, produces a clear, impressive, experimental acquaintance with divine truth, which cannot be acquired in any other way, and which peculiarly fits them for communicating clear and impressive conceptions of them to others; and it is held as a maxim applicable to all branches of knowledge, that an acquaintance with any subject which qualifies and entitles a man to become an instructor of others, must be thorough and extensive, such as to give him the clearest, fullest, and most impressive conception of it himself. And such a knowledge of the word of God and of divine truth cannot be attained, except by those who have in some measure succeeded in testing its real nature and its intended practical results upon themselves, by really applying it to resist temptation, and to promote their own spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. Hence it is not uncommon to meet with persons who have not read much, and who have had but little mental cultivation, but who have been long in the habit of applying the word of God and the doctrines of the gospel to the object of being enabled to resist temptation and be directed in difficulties, to be comforted in trials, and to be guided and encouraged in their spiritual progress, and who, by the study of the Bible, and by this process of practically applying it, have acquired an intimate and thorough knowledge of the word of God and of Christian truth, have attained to a clearness of conception on those subjects, and hold their views with a firmness of grasp which many book-learned theologians have never reached, and which all the ingenuity and sophistry of error cannot diminish or impair.

This is a process which ought to be ever going on, and which will certainly not impede but greatly promote your more formal studies in theology. As private Christians, you are bound to be continually resisting temptation, mortifying sin, and growing in grace; and by carrying on this process through the unceasing application of the word of God and divine truth, *and by the reflex act of observing the operations and affections of your own mind while the work of bringing divine truth to bear upon it is going on*, you will undoubtedly acquire much real practical available knowledge of the word of God and of the truths which it was intended to unfold, and this knowledge is of essential importance

to all who are allowed to be put in trust with the gospel. Divine truth is then only applied to its right purpose when it is employed in this way, then alone is it fully seen in its proper light and in its true character, and no one therefore can be regarded as possessed of a full and competent knowledge of it unless he has seen and watched the process of its being subjected to such experiments. It is your imperative duty, in accordance with the injunction which Paul gave to Timothy, to flee youthful lusts, which war against the soul, to be avoiding every appearance of evil, to be even already enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, *i.e.* to be mortifying pride and ambition, self-confidence, self-conceit, envy, and worldliness, and to be cultivating and cherishing in your souls all the fruits of the Spirit. In this work you will have temptations to resist and difficulties to encounter. You must employ the whole armour of God, especially the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, *i.e.*, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, you are to be ever employing the word of God and the truths which it unfolds; and by carrying on this process faithfully and conscientiously, and by reflecting on its nature, its manifestations, and its results, you will not only grow in grace and in meetness for heaven, but you will acquire a much more thorough insight into the word of God and the truths of Scripture, and be much more fully prepared than otherwise you could have been for wielding the sword of the Spirit for the conversion of sinners and the edification of Christ's body.

These are the processes by which theologians are made, and by which men are prepared for the work of the ministry—prayer, meditation, and temptation, in the sense in which Luther used it, and in which we have endeavoured to explain it. Prayer and the actual application of divine truth for resisting temptation and mortifying sin are matters of express and positive obligation upon all men considered simply as private Christians, who are called upon to work out their own salvation, and irrespective of any regard to their use as means of acquiring a full acquaintance with theology. If you have been brought at all to realise something of your relation to God, your need of mercy and grace, and your obligations to prepare for death and judgment, if you have for yourselves entered on the way to Zion,—and unless all this is the case, your profession of preparing for the work of the ministry is a

mockery of Him who yet is not mocked,—then you will certainly abound in prayer and supplication for the outpouring of the Spirit to guide you into all truth and holiness, and you will faithfully apply divine truth to enable you to die more and more unto sin, and to live more and more unto righteousness. And this work of praying for the Spirit and acquiring an experimental knowledge of divine truth by applying it to its great practical purpose and observing the nature and results of the process, must go on during all your lives. The duty of increasing in knowledge and in holiness continues ever to attach to you, until you are made perfect in holiness. You are to be sanctified by the Spirit and through the truth, and therefore it is your duty to abound in prayer, and to be bringing divine truth to bear upon every department of your nature and every circumstance of your situation; and by this process, faithfully pursued, will you assuredly acquire much sound knowledge of Christian theology, and make the best preparation for the work of the ministry.



LECTURE VI.

PRAYER, MEDITATION, AND TEMPTATION.

MEDITATION, as including learning, reading, and reflection, and especially reading and reflecting upon the Word of God, so as to understand the meaning of its statements and the import of its teaching, is that which in the ordinary relation of cause and effect bears most directly and immediately upon the acquisition of theological knowledge. Prayer and the experimental application of divine truth are exercises which mainly and principally lie between God and your own souls, in which it is with him you have to do, and where little aid or assistance can be derived from your fellow-men. In meditation or study you may derive much assistance from others, by their interpreting and explaining the word of God to you, illustrating and establishing the truths which are taught there, counselling you as to the books that ought to be read, and the way in which they may be read and studied to most advantage, and in various ways affording you at the commencement of your theological studies the benefit and the experience acquired by those who have already given some attention to the investigation of these subjects. And this is just in substance a description of the exercises in which we are to be engaged in this place. In entering upon so wide a field as the study of theology, it may be reasonably supposed that you may derive some benefit from the advice and assistance of those who have already more or less extensively traversed it. Were you to let yourselves loose upon the wide field of theological literature without system and without directions, you would be in some danger of losing yourselves amid the multiplicity of objects that might attract your attention and call forth your curiosity. And hence the necessity of studying upon a regular plan, and having

some directions laid before you as to the way and manner in which the plan may be most successfully prosecuted. It is only by your own reading and study, accompanied by the teaching of the divine Spirit, that you can become theologians. You must read and reflect. Theological knowledge cannot be put into you, *ab extra*, without your own faculties being called into vigorous exercise. It consists radically and essentially in the formation of correct judgments, as to the meaning and import of statements in God's word, on which different interpretations have been put. And therefore the acquisition of it necessarily implies that you yourselves study the word of God, make use of all the appropriate means by which its meaning may be ascertained and established, estimate the evidence bearing upon all the subjects investigated, and form your own judgments regarding them. You have no right, and still less are you under any obligation, to take upon trust the views of any man or body of men, without having satisfied yourself of their accordance with the only standard of truth. It is with God you have to do, it is to him you are responsible, and him alone you are to follow. "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship" (Con. c. xx. s. 2). You are then to exert your own faculties, and to exert them on your own responsibility to God, that under the guidance of his Spirit you may attain to the knowledge of his truth, and that this be done, and done intelligently, you must yourselves carefully investigate all the subjects to which your attention may be directed, and bring them, in the exercise of your own faculties, to be tried by the standard of God's word. You might be led by the authority of others and the influence of circumstances to adopt and profess a system of views that is really in accordance with the sacred Scriptures, while you had never fairly and impartially exercised your faculties upon the subject, and could give no satisfactory proof from the word of God of the views which you professed to entertain. But such a result would neither be satisfactory to yourselves nor to the church of which you might become ministers. The church of course does not wish any to enter her service except those who, after diligent study and careful investigation, are satisfied that the doctrines of her public profes-

sion are in accordance with the sacred Scriptures, and can give some account of the scriptural grounds on which they maintain them, and it is supremely important that in the prosecution of your studies, you should be ever animated by a sincere love of truth, by a real and honest desire to ascertain what is the mind and will of God. You are not indeed to suppose that you are at liberty to adopt any opinions you choose, or that it is not a matter of great importance what views you adopt upon theological subjects, provided only they are sincerely held. You are under obligation to know aright the will of God, and are responsible and justly punishable for mistaking it, just because God requires that of you, and because he has made sufficient provision for guiding to the knowledge of the truth all who honestly and faithfully improve the means and opportunities with which he has furnished them. There is sincerity in error as well as in truth, but still error is error, and truth is truth, the one in opposition to God's revealed will, and the other in accordance with it. The knowledge of the truth is the gift of God, and is traceable to or connected with the right and honest exercise of our faculties, and the faithful and conscientious improvement of our opportunities, while the adoption and maintenance of error is owing universally to some failure in these respects; to the want of a sincere and honest desire to know the truth, to the operation of some perverting and misleading influence, or to some failure in the diligence, caution, and perseverance with which our faculties have been brought to bear upon the investigation. This is an important principle that ought not to be lost sight of, especially in judging of ourselves, and in regulating our own conduct, in impressing upon our own minds the necessity of honestly and purely searching after truth, guarding against everything that might mislead us, and exercising our faculties with all due care and caution upon the various subjects which we may be called upon to examine.

But some caution and forbearance are necessary in applying this principle of the sinfulness of error in forming a judgment of others whose views we may reckon erroneous. It is true that all error is sinful, and has arisen from something sinful on the part of those by whom it is maintained. But it would be very unwarrantable and offensive to be making a direct and personal applica-

tion of this principle to all those who, we may be firmly persuaded, entertain erroneous views. Men are undoubtedly entitled, and indeed bound, to exercise their own faculties, and to form their own judgments in regard to all subjects that may be presented to them, without being subject to any authoritative control upon the part of their fellow-men, or of any but God and those who can produce God's commission. The connection between the understanding and the will, the investigation of those causes and influences that operate upon the formation of men's opinions, bears upon some of the deepest and darkest mysteries of the human spirit, involves points that may be imperfectly understood, even by those to whom they attach, and can in general be very imperfectly comprehended by others. They can be certainly known in individual cases only by Him who searcheth the hearts of the children of men, who understandeth our very thoughts afar off. The probability that men may have yielded to perverting and misleading influences in forming their opinions, is ordinarily just in proportion to their general character, to the integrity, candour, and love of truth which they usually manifest.¹ We ought ever to remember that we are all liable to yield to perverting influences, and the operation of collateral or adventitious circumstances in the formation of our opinions; and this should teach us charity and forbearance in judging of others whom we may believe to be in error. Upon the ground of those various considerations, it is manifestly improper and unwarrantable to be habitually and ordinarily applying the principle, however true in itself, that all error is sinful, to others whose views we may reckon erroneous. Within certain limits, and when there is no palpable outward evidence of a want of integrity and of due care in the formation of opinions, it is but reasonable to assume that those who may differ from us have been as honest and impartial in the formation of their opinions as ourselves, and though abstractly we may and should hold the general principle, that where there is error there is sin, yet the sin may, in many cases, be in some corner so obscure and inaccessible as to be cognisable only by Him who searcheth all things; so that men, in fairness,

¹ Apparently the author's meaning is, that in proportion to a man's candour and love of truth, is his anxiety to take all arguments into account, and therefore his liability to be unconsciously misled by adventitious circumstances.--Ed.

should content themselves with refuting the error without pronouncing upon the character and motives of the errorists. When men profess to have a sincere desire to know the truth, and have used honestly, so far as man can judge, the proper means for attaining to a knowledge of it,—when there is no public tangible proof of the falsehood of their professions, they are entitled to be treated as honest men, and should not be denounced as guilty of sin because of the errors in which we may believe them to be involved. In short, the right principle upon this point is, that before we can be warranted in personally applying to men who hold erroneous opinions the maxim that all error is sin, we should have some other proof besides the mere fact that they are in error,—proof such as men, who cannot see into the heart, may clearly apprehend and estimate, and which distinctly establishes against them some plain deviation from the course which an honest love of truth, and a faithful application of the right means for discovering it, would have produced. But while we should be careful of applying to others the maxim that all error originates in sin, and is traceable to something sinful as its cause, and while its application to others should be in general left to him who alone can apply it accurately, yet the maxim is undoubtedly true abstractly, and it is right that we should apply it to ourselves in regulating and in explaining our own conduct. We may be firmly persuaded that we will not fall into error except through some sin on our own part, through some sinful want of an honest and paramount love of truth, through some sinful negligence or oversight in the exercise of our faculties, or in the use of appropriate means, or through the indulgence of some sinful desire, or in the prosecution of some sinful object misleading and perverting us. Although there is a great deal of that which ought to pass among men for honesty and uprightness in the formation of opinions, and which ought to pass as such, just because men ought to be deeply conscious of their own liability to be misled, and are neither qualified nor entitled to judge of the hearts of others, yet we believe there is very little of pure and thorough impartiality in the sight of God, and that men's opinions, whether right or wrong, are but seldom the result of a purely honest and impartial consideration of the proper grounds on which they ought to rest, uninfluenced by collateral

and adventitious circumstances. Our opinions in most cases have been largely determined by the circumstances in which we have been placed and the influences under which we have been brought ; and men who know themselves would be slow of asserting that their opinions, even those which profess to be built upon the word of God, would certainly have been the same as they now are, had their lot been cast in a different sphere. The practical use of these considerations is, that remembering that all error is sinful, and that there are many influences continually at work to lead you into error, you strive to preserve a deep sense of your responsibility to God for all the opinions you form, to cherish a supreme and paramount desire to know his will and to ascertain the truth, and that you guard carefully against any influence that might mislead or pervert you. Let no opinions be taken up hastily and rashly under the influence of outward circumstances, or to have any selfish or party object. Let there be a constant reference to the word of God, the only infallible standard of truth. Let all due care and diligence be employed to understand the meaning and import of its statements, let a constant sense of your dependence upon the Spirit of truth be preserved, and let all your meditations and all your investigations be accompanied with private prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. Never forget that God's Spirit alone can guard you against the temptations to error which you have to encounter from without and from within, that sound theological knowledge, scriptural truth must be sought and obtained from Him, that the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and that he will shew them his covenant. Take care that you grieve not, that you quench not, the Holy Spirit, by neglecting to cherish a due sense of your dependence upon him, by indifference about really enjoying his guidance and ascertaining his mind and will, by restraining prayer, by regarding any iniquity in your hearts, by indulging in sloth or pride, in self-seeking and self-confidence, by failing to exercise your faculties, and to improve your opportunities under a deep sense of your responsibility to Him, and with a sincere determination to consecrate yourselves soul and body to his glory and service. It is by such means as these, and under such impressions and desires as these, that your theological studies ought to be conducted, and it is only when you are enabled to abound and to persevere in the use of these means,

and in the maintenance and habitual manifestation of this frame of mind, that you have reasonable ground to expect that you will be enabled to attain to a thorough knowledge of God's revealed will, and be fitted to become able ministers of the New Testament, not only having yourselves that knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ, which is eternal life, but able to teach others also.

Erroneous opinions upon any of the subjects concerning which God has given us information, are not only sinful and displeasing to him, but injurious to ourselves, adverse to our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace, and are therefore to be carefully guarded against in the use of all appropriate means, by keeping our hearts, and by regulating our conduct. Our Saviour has said, "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh" (Matt. xviii. 7). An offence here means anything that causes or tends to cause to stumble and fall, or to turn aside from the right path in matters connected with God and eternity. And of the offences in this sense which are so plentifully spread over the history of the church, errors and heresies form no inconsiderable portion. The erroneous opinions that have been broached, directly and in themselves, by their own proper tendency and results, and the fact that so many erroneous opinions all professing to be derived from one and the same source or standard have been maintained, have proved great stumbling-blocks in every age, have contributed largely to pervert men, and to lead them astray, and thus to endanger their eternal welfare. When our Saviour said "it must needs be that offences come," the leading idea he meant to convey was merely the certainty that in the actual condition of things, in the actual constitution of the world, and of man's nature, it would happen that stumbling-blocks would be laid in men's way, and that many would, in point of fact, fall over them, with perhaps the additional idea insinuated that even these offences would be over-ruled of God for accomplishing his own purposes. But the great lesson which the statement is fitted to impress is, that however certain or necessary offences may be, and to whatever extent this may be over-ruled for good, they involve, at all times, great and heinous guilt on the part of those who are responsible for them. And it must not be forgotten that for the evils which have arisen—the stumbling-blocks which have

been thrown in men's way—by controversies and divisions, those must bear the chief responsibility, and incur most fully the woe which our Saviour has denounced, who, by adopting and maintaining opinions that were erroneous and inconsistent with the standard of God's word, have rendered contention necessary, and thereby made themselves the real authors or causes of the offences, of the stumbling-blocks that have been thrown in the way of individuals and churches, tended to mar their progress in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and to obstruct the great ends for which they ought to have lived and laboured. Let this responsibility weigh deeply upon your minds, and let it prompt you to a diligent and faithful use of all those means, whereby through God's blessing the woe denounced by our Saviour may be avoided, and our spiritual nourishment and the peace and welfare of Christ's church may be advanced.

PREVIOUS STUDIES—LATIN, GREEK, AND HEBREW.

I have endeavoured to lay before you an outline of the wide field comprehended in the study of theological science, and the processes by the prosecution of which such a knowledge of theology as may fit you for becoming useful ministers of the gospel is to be acquired, comprehending, as the explanation of these processes does, a statement of the motives by which you ought to be animated, and of the spirit in which your whole theological studies ought to be conducted. I would now wish to lay before you a few practical directions as to the prosecution of your studies, not as to the prosecution of the study of any particular department of theology, for the different branches of the science may, in some respects, require special directions more immediately applicable to them severally, but bearing upon the mode of prosecuting your studies generally. It is assumed not only that you have gone through a curriculum of study in literature and philosophy, but that you actually possess a respectable measure of acquaintance with the subjects you profess to have studied. In authors who have written upon the general subject of the study of theology, these topics are usually adverted to under the head of *προπαιδεύματα*, or preliminary instructions, which ought to be mastered before men begin the proper study of theology. In so far as you are not possessed of a respectable acquaintance with all those subjects, you are not fully prepared

for entering upon theological study; and in so far as your knowledge of them is still partly defective, it is proper, in regard to some of them at least, that you should even now be giving some degree of attention to the object of repairing your deficiencies.

The most important branches of your previous studies, in so far as concerns their immediate use and bearing upon the prosecution of the study of theology, are a knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages, and an acquaintance with mental philosophy, as, including the powers and faculties, the capacities and susceptibilities of the mind, the principles and laws bearing upon the right use and application of these powers and susceptibilities upon investigating truth, judging of evidence, and establishing duty. No man can be regarded as having any pretensions to the character of a well-educated and accomplished theologian who has not read a considerable number of works which exist only in the Latin language; and hence the importance—we might almost say the necessity in the prosecution of theological study—of being so familiar with Latin as to be able to read ordinary theological Latin works, without finding much more difficulty, or requiring to spend much more time in the perusal of them, than you would on works in your own tongue. This is the sort of measure of the familiarity which you ought to possess with Latin; and such a degree of acquaintance with it you will find a most important advantage in the prosecution of your studies. In regard to Greek, there are fewer books in this language than in Latin which it is necessary for you to read for the mere sake of the information they contain; but the language, as a language, it is still more indispensable that you should thoroughly understand, because it is that in which the most important part of the inspired Scriptures were composed. A man's real theological knowledge may be said practically and substantially to be measured by his real knowledge of the Greek Testament; and in order to understand aright the Greek Testament, it is of course indispensable that he be familiar with the Greek language. And this leads us to advert to the general subject of the necessity of an acquaintance with the original languages in which the word of God has been given us by its authors. The Old Testament, you are aware, is written in the Hebrew language, with the exception of two or three short passages in Chaldee; and the New Testament in Greek. The Hebrew Old

Testament and the Greek New Testament constitute the word of God given by the inspiration of his Spirit, and forming the only authoritative rule of faith and practice. The will of God is to be learned authentically only from an examination of books written in these languages; and hence it follows at once that every one who is really desirous to know the will of God, and to know it thoroughly and authentically, and especially every one who aspires to be a religious instructor of others, is bound to acquire such a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek as may qualify him to derive his knowledge of God's will at once from the fountain-head, or at least to be able to test all the views that may be pressed upon him, by a reference to the only infallible standard, and to be qualified to defend, if necessary, his convictions upon religious subjects from the same sources. A translation of the Scriptures into any other language merely shews the interpretation put upon them by those who have executed the translation; and though most translations of the Scriptures into modern languages give a sufficiently clear and correct exposition of the mind and will of God in his word to serve all the infinitely important purposes of general practical instruction, yet no one will be contented with a translation who desires to be thoroughly versant in divine revelation, and who is called upon to be prepared to give a reason of his faith, and to defend God's truth against the assaults of error. It is true that many, very many, have been guided by God's Spirit into all truth; have been led to embrace Christ, and to become meet for heaven; have attained that knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life; who know God's will only through the medium of a translation. Nay, more, it is certain that God has honoured with singular usefulness as ministers of the gospel men whom he himself had called to labour in his vineyard, although they knew nothing of Hebrew or Greek.

But it is true in this as well as in other matters, that God's doings are not the rule of our duty, and that there rests an imperative obligation upon all who desire the office of a bishop to acquire, if they have the means and the opportunity, a knowledge of God's revelation as it came from himself, and of course in the original languages. This is plainly comprehended in the more general obligation undoubtedly attaching to them to acquire as full and accurate a knowledge of God's revelation as their circum-

stances admit of, before they venture to engage in the instruction of others. I trust you have all knowledge enough of the classic models of antiquity to be able to appreciate the difference between the original and a translation, in so far as the perception and enjoyment of literary beauty and excellence, the gratification of the taste and the emotions are concerned. This applies in all its extent and in full force to the difference between the Scriptures in the original and in a translation, however generally faithful and accurate. And were you disposed to study the Scriptures merely as literary productions and objects of taste, you would be called upon in fairness, with a view to your own enjoyment and gratification, to examine them in the original languages. But this of course is a low and inadequate view of the subject. It is a matter of imperative obligation that you should study the word of God for your own salvation and that of others. In a matter of such importance it is incumbent upon you to take every practicable security for understanding it correctly and thoroughly, and this necessarily implies an acquaintance with the original, especially in those who, in addition to the general obligation attaching to all men according to their circumstances to acquire as complete a knowledge as they can of God's word, are set for the defence of the gospel and the instruction of others. Whenever a difficulty or difference of opinion arises as to the mind and will of God, the ultimate appeal must always be to the Hebrew and Greek text; and the minister who cannot carry the appeal to that tribunal, and discuss it there, must be regarded as destitute of most important auxiliaries and influences for the right discharge of his duties, for the proper execution of his functions; and if God in his providence has given him opportunities of acquiring a knowledge of the original languages, and if he through carelessness, sloth, or perhaps spiritual pride, has failed to improve them, he is justly chargeable with a grievous dereliction of duty. There can be no doubt that our common English version of the Scriptures, though one of the best that has been made, and though quite sufficient for fully instructing the people in what they are to believe concerning God, and in the duty he requires of them, conveys in many instances the meaning of the original obscurely and ambiguously, and in not a few cases with some mixture of error and inaccuracy.¹

¹ Goode, *Divine Rule of Faith and Practice*, vol. i., p. 112, on 2 Tim. i. 13.

And hence the necessity of a constant appeal to the original in order that the mind of God may be fully and correctly known, and may be set forth with the authority and accuracy which ought to attach to the office and functions of the ministry. The great object of the ministry is to explain, enforce, and apply the statements contained in God's word. Their first duty, therefore, is to use the best means of attaining the full and certain knowledge of their meaning. It may be reasonably doubted whether any minister who has been favoured in providence with opportunities of acquiring a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek is warranted to go to the pulpit and profess to open up the mind of God in his word, without having satisfied himself by an examination of the original what the mind of the Spirit in the passage is, in place of taking it upon trust from others, whether translators or commentators.

Commentaries indeed often contain information as to the meaning of the original, when it may be given ambiguously or incorrectly in the translation commented on; but one who is himself ignorant of, or very imperfectly acquainted with, the original languages, can make no right use of what he may find on the subject in the commentary, and of course is as much dependent upon the commentator as otherwise he would have been upon the translators. The grand object of all your studies should be that you may clearly and correctly ascertain the meaning of the Spirit of God in the various statements which compose the Bible, and may be qualified to open up their true meaning to others, and to defend it against the assaults of adversaries; and an obviously essential part of this preparation is an acquaintance with the original languages. There is a great responsibility connected with ascertaining and setting forth the mind of the Spirit in the word, and a proper sense of this responsibility will constrain men to adopt the best and surest means of effecting this, though it may require of them some self-denial and sacrifice. The duty, then, of acquiring competent knowledge of the original languages of Scripture we urge upon you, not merely because the possession and application of this knowledge is fitted to afford you much satisfaction and enjoyment, not merely because it is creditable and becoming in a public instructor of others, and because the want of it is discreditable and dangerous; but on the ground of a still higher and more solemn consideration, viz., that by the neglect of

acquiring it, you are failing to do all that you can to prepare for attaining to the fullest, firmest, and most rational acquaintance with divine truth, and are thereby indicating that you have not a due sense of the responsibility connected with the infinitely important object of ascertaining the mind of God from his inspired word. You have all opportunities of acquiring a knowledge of the original languages of Scripture, and on the ground which we have stated, you are all bound to embrace and to improve them. It is not, of course, to be expected that all the ministers of a church should become profound philologists, though it is most desirable that every church should have some men who have given careful and lengthened attention to philological studies, and may thus be qualified to defend truth against the most learned opponents; but it is reasonable that all the ministers of the gospel who are favoured in Providence with the necessary opportunities, should possess such a knowledge of the original tongues as may enable them fully to satisfy themselves as to the certainty of the grounds on which they hold their convictions, and to qualify them to appreciate and employ aright the profound researches of others. Of the Greek language you have all acquired some knowledge already, and that knowledge it will be incumbent upon most of you to increase and extend, especially by the careful study of the Greek Testament itself, and other Greek works, which, being composed in a similar style and diction, *i.e.* with a large admixture of the Hebrew idiom, are more particularly fitted to afford assistance in studying the philology of the New Testament. The principal work of this kind is what is commonly called the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, a work which occupies this very peculiar and important place in the study of the Scriptures in the original, that it is almost indispensable to the careful philological study of both portions of the word of God. As a translation from the Hebrew, made when the Hebrew was, if not properly a living language, yet well known and carefully studied, and when there were much greater facilities for acquiring a knowledge of it than there have been in subsequent times, it is still one of the sources from which, as a virtual witness to the actual *usus loquendi*, we may derive some knowledge of the meaning of Hebrew vocables. And having been in familiar use by the inspired writers of the New Testament, and indeed actually

used by them in the quotations made in their writings from the Old Testament, and being composed in the same dialect or idiom as the New Testament itself, viz., what has been called Hellenistic, or Hebrew Greek, it is fitted to cast much light upon the meaning of particular words, and the whole structure of the language of the New Testament.

Of the Hebrew most of you are probably still ignorant, and if so, it ought to occupy a considerable portion of your attention during the present session—the Hebrew being not only the language in which the Old Testament was written, but some knowledge of it being necessary for fully understanding the Hebrew Greek of the New. It would be preferable on many accounts that you should have acquired some knowledge of Hebrew at an earlier period of your studies, and indeed before you entered upon the proper study of theology, both because, amid the interest with which you may now be expected to engage in your theological studies, there is some danger that you may feel the learning of a language to be rather irksome, and therefore be apt to neglect it, and to fail in giving it the requisite attention; and because it would be desirable that you should even now be prepared to enter upon the critical study of the Old Testament, instead of merely acquiring a knowledge of the elements of the Hebrew language. Arrangements, it is to be hoped, will soon be made for accomplishing this desirable object of securing that those who are contemplating entering upon a course of theological study shall acquire a competent knowledge of Hebrew before they begin. But if you have not yet learned the Hebrew language, it is your duty to do so now without any further delay; and if you are still very imperfectly acquainted with it, your knowledge should without delay be increased and extended. And with the advantages which in this place you enjoy for the study of it, you will, I have no doubt, find it a most interesting and useful occupation.

With regard to the extent to which your study of the original languages ought to be carried, and the amount of acquaintance with them which you are bound to acquire, it is surely not unreasonable that before entering upon the office of ministers of the gospel, and becoming the public instructors of others, you should be able to read the Scriptures in the original languages with

ease, without needing to have recourse to lexicons or translations. Without this measure of acquaintance with the Hebrew and Greek of the Scriptures, you may almost as well be entirely ignorant of them; for unless you possess this measure of acquaintance with them, you are scarcely qualified for applying to any practical use critical commentaries upon the Scriptures; and what is perhaps of still more importance, until you are so familiar with the original languages, that you can read the Scriptures without finding it necessary to have frequent recourse to the lexicon or the translation, you will not get into the habit, which is of inestimable value and importance, of reading and studying the sacred Scriptures in the words in which God has given them to us. Let this then be the object which you aim at, and which you are resolved by God's blessing to effect; and be assured that the acquisition of such a knowledge of the original languages will be at once the discharge of an important duty, and a source of abundant satisfaction and enjoyment to your own minds. The study of Hebrew you will prosecute under the superintendence of one¹ who is pre-eminently qualified to make it interesting and useful; and I will consider it part of my duty to take opportunities of ascertaining how far you are prepared for understanding and explaining the Greek Testament, and probably prescribing such exercises as the state of your efficiency in this respect may seem to require.

¹ The late Dr John Duncan.—ED.



LECTURE VII.

THE ENGLISH BIBLE—THE SABBATH—PRIVATE MEETINGS.

HAVING endeavoured to impress upon you the obligation of acquiring a competent knowledge of the Scriptures in the original languages, such a knowledge at least as may enable you to read the word of God in Hebrew and Greek, without needing to have recourse to lexicons and translations, and to appreciate and profit by the critical investigations of learned men, I would now press upon you with equal earnestness the necessity of acquiring, by daily perusal and study, a thorough familiarity with our common English version of the Bible. Though it is not the standard of our faith, and though it does not always bring out the meaning of the original clearly and correctly, yet it contains a representation of God's revelation, sufficiently clear and accurate for all the practical and devotional purposes for which a revelation was given to men, viz. that they might be led to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever. And there are two grounds upon which it is indispensable that, however familiar you may be with the Greek and Hebrew originals, you must also be thoroughly familiar with the common English version. The first is derived from a regard to your own personal spiritual nourishment and growth in grace; and the second, from a regard to your usefulness to others in the work of the ministry.

You must during all your lives be seeking to have deeper impressions of divine things, to be becoming more conversant with eternal realities, to hold more frequent communion with God, to have his word hid in your hearts and dwelling in you richly, that it may be more ready for constant use and application in leading you to resist temptation, to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness. Now, this familiarity with divine truth, and

this constant and ready application of it for regulating your feelings and your conduct—the whole process which Luther called temptation, and which we have already explained, accompanied as it should be with habitual prayer—requires, according to the ordinary principles of our constitution, the use of a language with which we are and have long been thoroughly familiar, and which we are in the constant habit of using. You may acquire all that knowledge of Greek and Hebrew which can be justly represented as *indispensable* to a well educated minister of the gospel, and may be in the habit of using this knowledge for its appropriate purpose in determining precisely and exactly the opinions you ought to form upon every department of divine truth, establishing their certainty, and defending them against adversaries, without having that thorough familiarity with the originals, which may enable you to apply them to constant and daily use in the practical business of elevating your desires and affections, of leading you to walk with God, and really to take his word as a light to your feet, and a lamp unto your path. In short, your own spiritual nourishment—an object never to be neglected—must be carried on through the instrumentality of your mother tongue; and hence the necessity of a thorough familiarity with the English Bible is indispensable to your usefulness in the work of the ministry. It is the English Bible that you are to explain from the pulpit; and though even in the pulpit it may sometimes be necessary, in faithfully discharging your duty of fully and accurately opening up the mind of God in his word, to advert to the original, and to point out how its meaning might have been given more clearly or more correctly than in our version; yet, practically and substantially, it is the English Bible alone with which the generality of those whom you are called upon to instruct will ever be conversant. It is with that same Bible that you are to go forth amongst them, unfolding its truths, enforcing its precepts, and applying its warnings and consolations. In short, the English Bible must be the great medium of your intercourse with them, the instrument with which you are to operate upon them, that which it should be the aim of your life to lead them through God's blessing to understand and apply; and hence the necessity, in order to the right discharge of the work of the ministry, of your being yourselves thoroughly familiar

with it, with all its contents, and with its whole meaning and applications. You are to exhort them to study it, to assist them in understanding and in applying it. Whatever *about the Bible* or its contents they may not know, you are to be prepared to make known to them. Whatever doubts or difficulties they may have about anything they may find there, you will be expected to explain and to solve. You would reckon it no doubt an important result of your labours among those committed to your care, if you succeeded in persuading them to adopt the practice of daily perusing and carefully studying the word of God, with a sincere desire to know its meaning, and with a determination to use all the means by which, through God's blessing they might rightly comprehend and apply it; and as they are entitled to look to their pastor for all necessary assistance and explanation in this work, it is indispensable that he be thoroughly versant in the knowledge of the Bible, and of everything necessary for explaining and illustrating it. There are many things which men are bound to know, were it for no other reason than because it is usually held discreditable for any man of liberal education to be ignorant of them. And in like manner it would be discreditable to ministers to be ignorant of anything about the Bible in common use, which all men ought to read, about which all ought to converse and inquire, and about which ministers are expected to be ever ready to give information.

There prevails even among ministers far too much ignorance of the Bible. There are some engaged in the work of publicly instructing men in religion, to whom a large portion of the word of God is in a great measure a *terra incognita*. We do not refer at present to their ignorance of the precise meaning of many of the statements of Scripture—an ignorance arising from their having done little in the way of searching the Scriptures, or carefully and critically investigating their import, and which we shall take an opportunity afterwards more fully to expose. We fear there is a great ignorance even of what might have been learned from a sufficiently frequent and careful perusal of the Scriptures, without any very exact investigation of the precise meaning of their particular statements—ignorance of the contents of the different books of Scripture, of the historical events there recorded, and of the biographies of the different persons there introduced.

Everything that can be learned from the perusal of every part of the Bible, and from the comparison of one part of it with another, should not only be well known, but should be deeply impressed upon the mind and memory, so as to be permanently remembered and ready for constant use and application. There is a large amount of general information, collected chiefly from the Bible itself, though partly also from other sources, about the authors of the different books of Scripture, the time and place where, and the objects for which they were written, the history, geography, chronology, antiquities, manners, and customs, &c., with which every minister ought to be familiar, and of which it is highly discreditable for him to be ignorant. All this knowledge is very easily acquired, being collected and arranged in many easily accessible books. But it ought to be acquired and impressed upon the memory, were it for no other reason than that it is discreditable to be ignorant of it. But what we are at present chiefly anxious to enforce is the necessity of familiarity with the contents of the Word of God itself, by daily perusal and study of it, so that you may become scribes well instructed into the kingdom of heaven, and ever ready to bring forth out of the treasures of the word whatever may be most suitable for forming men's opinions, for impressing their hearts, for guiding them in difficulties, and comforting them in trials. All ministers ought to be like Apollos, mighty in the Scriptures, thoroughly familiar with the contents, deeply imbued with the Spirit, and intimately conversant with the use and application of the word of God, and these qualifications can be secured only through the working of God's Spirit accompanying the daily and habitual, the careful and reverential perusal of them.

This daily perusal of the common version of the Bible may be conducted in different ways, which have their respective advantages. It is useful sometimes to read over a considerable portion of the word of God without stopping to investigate carefully the meaning and connection of particular statements and clauses, in order to have a general view of the contents, leading object and main scope of any particular portion of Scripture, and observations and lessons of a useful and important kind will often occur in connection with such a process, which might not have been otherwise suggested. This therefore is a process which should be

occasionally and from time to time applied, and applied repeatedly to all the different portions of the Scriptures. But still it is practically and substantially true that your real knowledge of Scripture will be very much in proportion to the degree of time and attention which you devote to the careful and accurate investigation of the meaning and connection of its different statements, comparing them with each other, and seeking for the enlightening influences of the Spirit of truth. Most of you probably do not yet know enough of Hebrew to read with any use or profit the Old Testament in the original, or to give more time and attention to this than the prosecution of your prescribed studies at the Hebrew class may require. But you should all be able to read the New Testament in Greek, and should make it an object of primary importance to acquire day after day greater facility in doing so. And you have all access to the study of the common version of the Bible, the regular daily perusal and study of which, in a right spirit, and accompanied with fervent prayer, will almost insensibly, and to your own surprise, increase your knowledge as well as deepen your impressions of divine things, and contribute more than anything else to furnish you with materials at once for promoting your own growth in grace, and preparing you for becoming useful and instructive ministers of the word.¹

While we would most earnestly inculcate upon you the most conscientious diligence and the most unremitting perseverance in the prosecution of your studies, on the ground of the extent of the field you have to traverse, we would at the same time recommend to you to devote to your professional studies only six days of the week, and to devote the Lord's day to exercises bearing upon objects common to you with ordinary private Christians, and connected with your own personal growth in righteousness and holiness. It is true that most of the books which you may be called upon to peruse, and of the subjects to which you may need to direct your attention in the prosecution of your professional studies, may be such as might lawfully or without sin occupy your time and thoughts on the Lord's day. It is true also that part of your professional studies consists, as we have

¹ See Dupin's *Method*, p. 119. I recommend as most useful, and indeed indispensable, Bagster's interleaved editions of Hebrew and Greek originals, with English version.

endeavoured to explain, in applying divine truth to the promotion of your own spiritual nourishment; and that while this is incumbent upon all Christians, it is by special obligations and additional motives incumbent upon students of theology. It may also be reasonably expected, considering the motives by which you profess to be animated, and the objects you profess to aim at, that the whole prosecution of your studies shall be pervaded by a spirit of prayer, by a sense of your responsibility to and dependence upon God, and by a paramount regard to his glory. But while all this is true, and should not be forgotten or neglected, it is also true that the Lord's day ought to be devoted more immediately and peculiarly to the promotion of the divine life in your souls. Your professional studies, directed to the attainment of theological knowledge, ought to be regarded very much as your ordinary lawful occupation, to be diligently prosecuted in the fear of God during the six days on which we are authorised to labour and do all our work, while the seventh should be reserved entirely for Him, who on that day rested from all his works, and should be devoted to exercises and occupations bearing upon the proper relation of men to their common Creator and Redeemer, and the objects which, in virtue of this common relation, they are bound to aim at and to secure. Your professional studies may rightly occupy the principal share of your time and attention for six days in the week, just like the ordinary lawful secular business of other men; but on the Lord's day you ought to be chiefly influenced by the consideration, not so much that you are students of theology preparing for the work of the ministry, that you may be made instrumental in promoting the salvation of others, but rather that you are, in common with many of the poorest, humblest, and most illiterate of the human race, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who are bound to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, and to become progressively more meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. One temptation to which you are exposed, and against which you are called upon to guard, is that of studying the word of God and investigating theological subjects in a merely professional spirit, as if it were a merely intellectual exercise, as if your only object was to increase your knowledge, and thereby to prepare for a creditable examination and a creditable discharge of the ordinary business of the profession you have

chosen. There is a danger in this way of your being led into an irreverent and careless way of thinking and speaking of divine things, and losing sight of the great practical purpose for which all the doctrines of God's word were revealed. And hence the importance of your sometimes, as it were, throwing off your merely professional character as students of theology, and directing your attention to the word of God and divine things simply as men who are bound to attend to their own personal salvation, to their own spiritual nourishment; and the proper time for securing this object by these means is peculiarly the Lord's Day.

On these grounds, derived from a regard to your own duty and welfare, requiring that this be attempted some time, and from the objects and end of the Lord's Day, plainly requiring that it be done then, you should feel it to be incumbent upon you to engage in the public services of the sanctuary, not as critics who have come to learn something that may be useful in your profession, but as hearers of the word, who are anxious to have divine truth more deeply impressed upon your own hearts, and as members of congregations who are called upon to unite in offering up supplications for what you collectively and individually need, and to devote the remainder of the day to the practical and devotional, rather than the critical reading of the word of God, to self-examination, and meditation upon unseen and eternal realities, and to the perusal of works of a practical and devotional character. That you may enjoy the full benefit of the Lord's day as a Sabbath, a day of rest, your intellectual powers should not be kept at their full stretch, or occupied with intricate and perplexing speculations. That you may enjoy the full benefit of it as a day set apart for spiritual ends, you must spend it in the public and private exercises of God's worship, and you must engage in these exercises with a sincere desire to get from them those spiritual blessings which they are intended to convey to all. Thus, and thus only, will you spend the Lord's Day in accordance with God's will, and in the way best fitted to promote all the objects you ought to aim at. Thus will you secure that blessing which alone maketh rich and maketh wise.

It has been usual to recommend young men who are engaged in the study of theology to have private meetings and private intercourse in various ways among themselves for mutual assistance and encouragement; and such meetings and such inter-

course, if rightly conducted, may undoubtedly be attended with important advantages. I trust that your whole intercourse with each other will be regulated by a due sense of the importance and sacredness of the studies in which you are now engaged, and of the office to which you aspire; and that your time, so far as is consistent with a due regard to your health, will be honestly and assiduously devoted, not to amusement or frivolity, or even to the more rational pleasure of social intercourse, but to your own personal spiritual improvement, and to the promotion of your theological knowledge and fitness for the ministry of the gospel. And among the means which may contribute instrumentally to the promotion of these objects, one is private meetings among yourselves for prayer, conference, and the reading of the Scriptures. The arrangements for such meetings will probably be somewhat regulated by your personal and relative circumstances, your acquaintance with each other, and similarity of tastes and dispositions. You will naturally converse with each other, as you have time and opportunity, upon the books you read, the lectures you hear, and the studies in which you are engaged. And it is right and proper that you should do all this with a view to mutual improvement, not only casually as occasion may offer, but regularly and statedly uniting together in small circles or companies, as friendship or acquaintance, similarity of tastes and dispositions, or opportunities and convenience for regularly meeting together, may attract and combine you. The safest, most profitable, and in every way the best exercise for meetings of a small number of students that might be held probably (according to circumstances) once a week, is the study of the word of God in the original, or practically, in your present state of progress and proficiency, the study of the Greek Testament, accompanied with prayer. Nothing affords either a more convenient, or more suitable, or a more profitable exercise for such meetings than this.

When engaged in the study of the Greek Testament you are occupied with that which is at once the best means of increasing your theological knowledge and your personal spiritual advancement. And it is therefore of the last importance that this study should be prosecuted until you thoroughly understand it, and can fully apply it. A brotherly conference upon a passage of Scrip-

ture by a few persons who have previously given some time to meditation upon it, is well fitted to afford important advantages for understanding its meaning and application. In such meetings it would be desirable that a passage in the Greek Testament should be selected beforehand, *i.e.* at the previous meeting, on which some one of the company should be expected to prepare himself for explaining and opening up, both in the way of unfolding its precise and exact meaning, and pointing out the practical application that ought to be made of it; after which the other members, who should also make the passage a subject of previous private study and meditation, should all deliver their sentiments, and bring in their contribution of anything that has occurred to them, or that may seem fitted to bring out either the exact meaning of the passage, or its practical spiritual bearing upon character and conduct. Such exercises as these, if conducted in a right spirit, are fitted to contribute greatly to increase of knowledge of the Scriptures, and to godly edifying. The selection of a passage of the Greek Testament, to be studied and meditated on privately, tends to secure that some degree of attention shall regularly be given to that which is (except prayer) the most important and profitable of all exercises. The necessity of stating at the weekly meetings, though briefly and simply, what may have recurred on the examination of the passage, will assist you in ascertaining whether you have really formed any clear and definite conceptions about it; for men cannot be very sure that they have really formed any very clear and definite conceptions until they have attempted to embody them in words; while the observations of the other members of the company upon the passage and upon the remarks that may have been made upon it, pervaded as they should be by a spirit of profound reverence for God's word, and of cordial kindness to each other, may often be useful in suggesting hints, admonitions, and cautions as to the oversights or errors that may have been committed. Such meetings of a few friends regularly and stately for prayer and the reading and exposition of the Greek Testament, are fitted to produce important beneficial results. They should consist ordinarily of but a small number of members—five or six probably are enough—and they should be conducted with privacy.¹ These meetings should not only be opened and closed

¹ Instead of taking detached passages of the Greek Testament, it might probably

with prayer, but pervaded by a spirit of prayer; and they should be carefully and steadily directed to the object of promoting the growth in knowledge and in grace of the members who compose them. As the members will, of course, state their doubts and difficulties as to the meaning of the words and clauses of the passage, and as to the justness and accuracy of any of the observations that may have been made upon it, and as these will thus become the subjects of brotherly conference, it may be usually expected that before the meeting terminates all the members will have formed clearer and more accurate conceptions than they had before of the meaning and import of the particular portion of God's word which may have occupied their attention. Those of you who may be disposed to adopt this suggestion, and who may be enabled to follow it out in this way and in this spirit, will, I have no doubt, have occasion to look back with gratitude to God upon this exercise, as not the least useful in which you were led to engage in the prosecution of your studies.

It has been no uncommon thing for students, while engaged in their theological studies, to give some portion of their time to exercises that may be considered fitted, in some measure, to prepare them for pastoral labour, such as instructing the young in Sabbath schools, visiting the sick, or visiting among the poor from house to house. I am not prepared to discourage you from giving some little time to those exercises, and specially the teaching of a Sabbath school, if opportunity and inclination should lead you to it; but neither, on the other hand, am I prepared to recommend such labours and exercises specially at this early period of your studies. Your time might be worse spent than in such exercises as these, but I think it might also be better spent for the present in the vigorous and energetic prosecution of your studies. You should spend much time in reading, much time in meditating and reflecting upon what you read and hear, much time in the study of God's word, and in all those pursuits and exercises that may contribute to enable you to understand it. And these exercises, with the time that should be devoted to prayer and the promotion

be desirable to take some one of the shorter and easier books, and go over it regularly. You would thus have a better opportunity of directing your attention to the contents and scope of the whole passage, which is often of primary importance in understanding and applying the Scriptures.

of the life of God in your own souls, with what may be reasonably allowed for relaxation and social intercourse, will probably provide for most of you in the meantime sufficient occupation. At the present period of your studies, the business of your different classes, the careful study and thorough investigation of the subjects which are there brought before you, must constitute your chief occupation, to which everything else must be subordinate. This is present duty. This is peculiarly the work to which God is at present calling you, and to which therefore your time and energies should be cheerfully devoted. There is in the present condition of the church to which you have attached yourselves a loud call for strenuous and active exertion, for much work among our countrymen in promoting their spiritual welfare; but that is only an additional reason why, while you are engaged in the prosecution of your studies, you should labour in the acquisition of theological knowledge, and a thorough acquaintance with God's Word, with unwearied diligence and activity, and improve to the utmost your present opportunities, in order that when you are called to engage in pastoral labours, and when you may have comparatively little leisure for study, you may still be able to approve yourselves as workmen that need not to be ashamed.



LECTURE VIII.

METHOD OF THE COURSE.

WE are now prepared to proceed to give some explanation of the way in which the subjects that are to occupy our attention during this session are to be taken up and laid out, and of the way in which the business of the class is to be conducted. The main subjects to which your attention is to be directed, are the evidences of Christianity; the divine origin, inspiration, and the canonical authority of the books of Scripture, the rule of faith, as including the topics of the perspicuity, sufficiency, and perfection of the written word of God as the only standard of faith and practice—a subject of peculiar importance in the present day, when all the errors on this topic, in opposition to which the Reformers had to contend against the Church of Rome, have been revived by many who have not openly joined the Papal apostacy; and last, though not least, the general principles of Hermeneutics, or of the interpretation of the sacred Scriptures, and especially of the New Testament. When you reflect on the extent and magnitude of these subjects, you must see at once that it is a very brief and meagre outline of them that can be brought under your notice in the public business of the class, and that your progress in a thorough knowledge of them must depend mainly, under God, upon the zeal and assiduity with which you prosecute your own private studies. So extensive are the subjects, and so much has been written upon all of them by men of distinguished talent and learning, that if we were to attempt to act upon the principle of laying before you all the useful information that might easily be collected, any one of the subjects that have been mentioned might occupy us for a whole session. Take, for instance, the subject of the evidences of Christianity. So much has been written upon

this subject, and so full are the materials which have been provided upon all the various branches of the proof, that there would be no great difficulty, if it were worth while, to put together lectures which would occupy the whole of the time during which we may be together in this class. But this would be a great waste of your time, because it would be devoting a disproportionate share of attention to that subject, and because any topic that could be introduced might be found discussed in the fullest and most satisfactory manner in the innumerable works upon this subject, some of which you ought to read. The same general considerations apply to every department of theological science. It is true of them all, that so much has been written upon them, that, in the first place, only a very meagre outline of the subjects can be given in public prelections, and, in the second place, that the substance of all that can be said about them may be found in works to which your attention may be directed. On these grounds, it is my intention to aim rather at the training of theological students than the mere discussion of theological subjects ; rather to aim at explaining the general nature and position of the different topics which may come before us ; to point out the way and manner in which they ought to be viewed and studied ; the books you ought to peruse, and the use you ought to make of them ; rather than to attempt to give formal discussions upon the various subjects. With the leading subjects that enter into the course, it is my duty to endeavour to secure that you all acquire a respectable measure of acquaintance, to give you such assistance by lectures, explanations, and examinations, as may seem fitted to afford facilities for your acquiring the necessary information and satisfying your judgments. It would be a waste of time and labour to be writing out and delivering to you lectures upon topics which had been discussed and exhausted in works that might be recommended to your perusal, and might be quite accessible to you, when, as must often be the case, nothing had occurred to me that seemed fitted to improve the way in which the truth, and the grounds on which it rested, could be explained and illustrated, and when the discussions respecting the particular topics had not assumed any new form or aspect since the time when works in which it was fully and satisfactorily disposed of had issued from the press. Our business here should be one of teaching and training, and not seek-

ing to interest and attract by mere speculation and discussion. The great direct object to be aimed at—that to which every other is subordinate—is to secure as far as possible that every one of you shall, in the course of your theological studies, acquire that measure of theological knowledge and other qualifications, that may be considered indispensable for your becoming useful and respectable ministers of the gospel; and this necessarily implies that we proceed in a beaten track, and do not wholly omit anything that is really useful and necessary, however ordinary or commonplace. It would be an important and desirable result of our labours and studies in this place, if you were all inspired with such a love for the study of theology, as that you might continue to prosecute this study, more or less, all your lives, and that thus those of you whom God has gifted with superior powers, and whom in his providence he may furnish with suitable opportunities, might become distinguished theologians. But this is an object which, except in so far as concerns our seeking to inspire you with a love for the study of theology, cannot be directly and distinctly aimed at. What is at once practicable and imperative is to secure that you all acquire such a measure of theological knowledge as the church is entitled to expect, and bound to exact, before admitting you to the office of ministers of the gospel. This may, through the divine blessing, be attained, and it is my duty to make the attainment of it my principal object—one to which everything else should be subordinated. While all of you ought to aim at this, and to reach it, none of you, even those of you who have the greatest capacity, zeal, and diligence, can go very greatly beyond it during the period of your theological studies; and hence it is the duty of all of you, in place of indulging in any predilection you may form for any particular department of theological study, and following it out exclusively, to give your time and attention to the ordinary business of your different classes, to read and meditate or reflect upon the subjects which are there brought under your notice. The principal objects to which public prelections on such subjects should be directed are to awaken your interest in the different topics by pointing out their nature, relations, and importance, explaining and removing difficulties, directing to sources of fuller information, and bringing out by examination at once your knowledge and your ignorance, and thus leading to a more strenuous exertion of your faculties, and

of course to your forming clearer and more definite ideas of the various subjects that may be brought before you. To excite your interest, to stir up your faculties, to direct you in your investigations, to point out to you the errors and dangers into which you are most apt to fall, and the obstacles that might obstruct your progress,—these should be the chief objects of a teacher of theology. Your real and direct knowledge of theology must come principally from your own reading and reflection, and the operation of God's Spirit. And in regard, more particularly, to the study of the word of God, the basis of all sound theological knowledge, no exposition of its statements that might be given in this place, and no mere reading of commentaries, however full and extensive, will be of any very material benefit to you without the full, careful, and deliberate application of your own powers and faculties in secret, and under the guidance of him who seeth in secret, to the investigation of its meaning. Unless you read much, think much, and pray much, you will gain little by your mere attendance in this place, or by anything that can be done in public prelections; and one main object, therefore, should be to lead you to abound in these exercises, and to assist and encourage you to persevere in them. In regard to prayer, we trust we need say nothing more than we have already set before you; and with respect to reading and meditation, the objects to be aimed at will be best promoted by intermingling regular lectures on important subjects, especially in explaining their general nature, position, and relations to each other, with examinations upon topics or books prescribed, and occasional explanations, such as the examinations and the subjects of them may suggest.

The first subject usually brought under the notice of those who are commencing their theological studies is what is commonly called Natural Theology, or the information that may be obtained concerning God from the natural exercise of our own powers upon ourselves and upon the objects around us, including an investigation of the process by which this information is acquired, and the purposes which it is fitted to serve. We do not mean to dwell upon the exposition of this subject—first, because our proper subject is Christian theology—*i.e.* the opening up of the character and the meaning of the Word of God—and because on this subject there are sufficient materials for occupying your time and atten-

tion more usefully and more profitably; and, second, because we could add nothing of any value to what is contained in Dr Chalmers' two volumes on Natural Theology, which contain what is in many respects by much the most valuable and satisfactory discussion of the subject to be found in our language, and which you ought all, if possible, to read without delay, if you are not already familiar with them. We shall confine the little we say upon this subject to such observations as may assist you in understanding the general place which natural theology has usually occupied in theological science and literature, and its bearing upon the evidences of Christianity.

The question is this, Can men, by the exercise of their natural faculties upon themselves, and upon other objects around them, ascertain and prove the existence of an intelligent First Cause of all things; and if so, what is the amount of the information which *in this way* may be acquired concerning him? Now, it has been shewn in innumerable works, and by unanswerable arguments, that men, in the fair exercise of their faculties, looking within upon themselves, and without upon the world around them, are reasonably and necessarily led to believe that there exists an invisible intelligent Being, to whom they themselves, and all other objects of their contemplation, owe their existence; that this great Being must rule and govern everything according to the counsel of his own will; that he is possessed of the highest moral excellence, and ought therefore to be worshipped and obeyed. This can be proved by processes of argument, which assume nothing except the existence of those objects of which our senses and our consciousness take cognizance, and give us information. The arguments by which all this has been established have been assailed by atheists, pantheists, and sceptics, but their sophisms have been all answered and exposed; and the matter just stands thus, that if truth be discoverable by the human faculties, *this* is true, and that, even without any abstract deliverance as to the capacity of the human faculties to discover truth, men cannot in point of fact fairly and honestly use their faculties without being led to such conclusions as these.

There is, however, a distinction of some importance to be attended to between the truth of these doctrines concerning God, as propositions which can be maintained and defended unanswer-

ably by reasoning against all who may deny or dispute them, and the ability of men, without revelation, and in the mere use of their natural faculties, to have found them out. That men could have discovered them does not necessarily follow from the fact that they can now prove them, and we have no opportunity of appealing to historical facts to settle this question; for if God has ever given supernatural revelations of himself to men, he has given them from the creation of the world, so that even men who had not any written revelation of God's will, may have had the benefit of traditionary remnants of a primary revelation. But this question is rather curious than important. The only thing practically important, so far as natural theology is concerned, is that we be able to *prove* from reason against any man who may dispute it, that there is an intelligent First Cause, who has created and governs all things. It is indeed true, in point of fact, that nations which have not enjoyed the benefit of a written revelation have usually had a very imperfect acquaintance with God, with his character and government, and with the duty and obedience which he requires; and even to deists—at least to those of them who profess to be really concerned about the grounds of natural religion—it ought to be a strong presumption in favour of the truth of the Christian revelation, that for many ages the Jews, who professed to have a divine revelation, were the only nation in the world who generally believed in the unity of God, or had any worthy conceptions of his character and government; and that wherever the Christian revelation has been diffused, there much more correct views of everything about God have prevailed than have ever obtained where that revelation was unknown. Voltaire and others, English infidels, alleged that the Jews worshipped a θεός ἑγχωρίως. And all this affords a strong evidence of the desirableness and necessity of a revelation, while at the same time, along with other circumstances that might be mentioned, it affords a strong presumption that much of the knowledge of God, such as it was, that obtained among heathen nations, was derived not from reasoning, but from tradition.

In the views given us in Scripture concerning the divine character and government, there is nothing contrary to what enlightened reason teaches or confirms upon the same subject. But much fuller information is there given us concerning God,

and especially concerning his plans and purposes with respect to the human race, and the way in which he ought to be worshipped and served, than could in any other way have been attained. While atheists, pantheists, and the more reckless sceptics deny that any certain proof can be deduced from the light of nature and the exercise of reason for the existence, character, and moral government of God, deists have usually gone into the opposite extreme, and have maintained the perfect sufficiency of the light of nature or of human reason, to guide men to a full knowledge of God, and of the worship and obedience which they ought to render to him, so as to enjoy his favour and attain to happiness. It is indeed true that very many of those who, while professing deism, have denied the truth of Christianity, have given sufficiently plain indications that they are not very cordial in supporting the doctrines of the providence and moral government of God and a future state of rewards and punishments; still there have been some—as, for example, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, the father of the English deists, and the most respectable among them—who really seemed anxious to establish the leading doctrines of natural religion, while they rejected revelation, and maintained that natural religion was sufficient to guide men to the knowledge of God, to duty, and to happiness. Hence the question of the sufficiency of reason or natural religion to guide men to the knowledge of God's will, and the enjoyment of his favour, has entered pretty largely into the controversy about the truth of Christianity, the defenders of Christianity maintaining the insufficiency of reason and the necessity of revelation. This controversy is not one of very great importance, in so far as its bearing upon the proper direct evidence of Christianity is concerned. And in that aspect of it, it is, I think, sufficiently and very sagaciously disposed of in the first sentence of Paley's *Evidences*, in these words: "I deem it unnecessary to prove that mankind stood in need of a revelation, because I have met with no serious person who thinks that even under the Christian revelation we have too much light, or any degree of assurance that is superfluous." But the controversy has led to much able and interesting discussion concerning the grounds and evidences of natural religion, the capacities and the wants of man, the origin of the world, and the general state of religion and morality among heathen nations;

and much that has been written upon it affords an excellent commentary upon the statements both of doctrine and fact contained in the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. We have not very many better books than Halyburton's *Natural Religion insufficient, and Revealed necessary to man's happiness in his present state*, in answer to Lord Herbert. And when the sufficiency of reason or natural religion was again maintained in Tindal's work, entitled *Christianity as old as the Creation; or, The Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature*, some very able men came forward to maintain the insufficiency of reason or natural religion, and to defend the necessity of revelation and the claims of Christianity, especially Conybeare and Law in the Church of England, and Leland and Foster among Dissenters; though it may well be doubted whether any one of them went as deep into the real merits of the question as Halyburton had done. [Whitby, Leland, and Tholuck,¹ on the state of the heathen world, as shewing the necessity of revelation.]

It may be fairly enough presumed that the measure of knowledge of God and duty and a future state actually reached by the most distinguished philosophers of Greece and Rome—men who in point of natural talents have never been surpassed, and who devoted their powers to the investigation of these subjects—indicates what the unassisted reason of man could attain to in theology; and that the much fuller, more complete, and better-established systems of natural religion which have been put forth in modern times, and where Christianity was known, mark the distinction between what men by their reason could have discovered or found out, and what they can prove to be true, when the ideas have been suggested to them from some other source. Certain it is that the fullest system of natural religion, and the most conclusive proofs from reason of the truth of the doctrines which constitute it, are to be found in the writings of men who were believers in the truth of the Christian revelation. They may be found in the collection of the Boyle Lectures and others published in England in the early part of last century, although it ought to be mentioned that that was not the period in the history of our theological literature when

¹ Tholuck on "The Nature and Moral Influence of Heathenism," *Biblical Cabinet*, No. 28.

our most eminent theological writers, generally speaking, entertained the soundest views in regard to Christian theology, *i.e.* the contents of the Scriptures, or the systems of doctrine revealed to us in the Word of God.

The question whether the leading doctrines commonly believed among us concerning the existence, character, and moral government of God, and a future state of rewards and punishments, as the basis of the worship and obedience to be rendered to him, can be established by reason, has been discussed not only between Christians and atheists or sceptics, but has also formed a subject of controversy among professed believers in revelation. The great body of believers in revelation have held that the leading doctrines of natural religion can be established by reason, and they have held this general proposition upon two distinct grounds—one common to them with those deists who have not sunk into atheism or scepticism, and the other derived from the information contained in the sacred Scriptures. They have held this conviction—first, because they can point to the proofs which have been adduced in support of the doctrines of natural religion, proofs which are in entire accordance with the strictest principles of sound logic, and which all the efforts of atheists and sceptics have not been able successfully to assail; and second, because the sacred Scriptures, which they believe to contain an authentic revelation of God's will, sanction the idea that men, in the exercise of their own faculties, are able to attain to such a knowledge of God as to make them responsible for not worshipping and serving him aright. The question, as discussed among professed believers in revelation, is thus stated by Turretine in his *Theologia Elenctica* (loc. i. ques. iii.)—a work of inestimable value, which I hope all of you will master before you complete your theological studies, and the two first *loci* of which contain much important matters on most of the topics comprehended in our course for this session—first more generally in this way, “An detur theologia naturalis?” and then more particularly, “An detur in homine talis facultas naturalis ipsi insita quæ se ultro et sponte exerat in omnibus adultis sana mente præditis, quæ complectatur non modo potentiam intelligendi, sed etiam principia naturalia notitiarum ex quibus conclusiones tum theoreticæ tum practicæ deducuntur? quod asserimus.” In order to define more

precisely the extent to which he maintained that there was a natural theology, or that men could by reason attain to the knowledge of God, he adds—"Non quæritur an cognitio ista sit perfecta et salutaris? Fatemur enim post peccatum valde obscuratum esse, ut ad salutem penitus insufficiens facta sit, sed tantum an aliqualis supersit in homine de Deo cognitio, per quam persuadeatur Deum esse, et esse religiose colendum." And it is a curious circumstance, and strikingly illustrative of the inconsistencies and vagaries of the human mind, that among the professed believers in revelation some leading Socinians,¹ who commonly err in the opposite extreme of ascribing too much to human reason, have been almost the only persons who have denied that men by the exercise of their faculties could attain to some knowledge of the existence and character of God, and of the duty he requires. The explanation of this curious anomaly of the adoption of such a view by some leading Socinians is, however, obvious enough. By denying the priestly office of Christ—in other words, the fundamental doctrines of the gospel—they are much at a loss for any adequate explanation of the reasons or causes of the mission of Jesus Christ, and of the revelation contained in the Scriptures, and under a consciousness of this sort have endeavoured to magnify Christ's prophetic office, by representing him as making known through the Scriptures information which has been generally supposed to be in some measure revealed by reason, but which they ascribed exclusively to Christianity and the Scriptures, as if to compensate for the grievous injury they did them in other respects, or as if to satisfy themselves that though there was no need of any such thing as an atonement for sin, there was yet a sufficient reason for the mission of Christ in making known to men the existence of God, and the way in which he ought to be worshipped and served.

That the mission of Christ and the revelation contained in the Scriptures have rendered most important services to natural religion, or to the doctrines usually comprehended under that designation, by the additional clearness and certainty with which its doctrines are now in consequence taught and established, is certain. But this was only a subordinate object of Christ's mission and of the revelation contained in the Scriptures; and men are not

¹ Socinians, however, have differed among themselves on this point. Stapfer, *Theol. Polemica*, vol. iii. p. 412.

so entirely dependent upon this revelation, as some Socinians have supposed, for all certain knowledge of the existence and character of God. And accordingly, as Turretine tells us, orthodox divines have constantly maintained, and have proved both from reason and Scripture, "*theologiam naturalem dari, partim insitam, quæ ex libro conscientiæ hauritur per κοινὰς ἐννοίας, partim acquisitam, quæ ex libro creaturarum petitur per discursum*" (loc. i. ques. iii. vol. i. p. 7). And in the first chapter of our Confession of Faith, to which I would direct your special attention, as it contains an admirable statement of the whole substance of the principal truths which during a considerable part of the course it will be my chief duty to explain and illustrate, the doctrine is set forth in these words:—"Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God as to leave men inexcusable, yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation." There are here, you will observe, two positions set forth—first, that, according to the language of Turretine, there is a natural theology, or that men, by the exercise of their faculties, can attain to a knowledge not only of the existence of God, but in some measure of his character—such a knowledge of him as to leave them inexcusable; and second, that they cannot in this way, or without a revelation, attain to such a knowledge of God as is necessary to salvation, or ultimate and permanent happiness. The Confession, which professes to exhibit only a summary of what is taught in Scripture, appeals to the word of God in support of both of these positions; and it is certainly not difficult to establish them from Scripture against all who might deny them, and who yet admitted its authority. If called upon to discuss these positions with men who do not admit the authority of Scripture, we must prove them from the principles of reason, which they admit. The proof of the first of them, or of the existence of such a natural capacity of knowing God as to render men inexcusable, must be derived, as we have already remarked, just from a statement of the evidences of the existence and character of God, and of the ground thus laid for the obligation to worship and serve him, and from a conclusive exposure of the objections that may be adduced against the validity of this evidence. When we can point to such a body of proof derived

from the light of nature and the works of creation and providence, and when we have answered any objections that may be adduced against its validity, we are then entitled to assert that we have proved from reason that there *is* a natural theology, and that consequently even men who have not had the benefit of a revelation are without excuse if they have not been worshipping and serving God. And the proof of this same position from Scripture is to be found in those numerous portions of it which represent God's works of creation and providence as fitted to lead, and as actually leading, men to recognise his existence, to adore his perfections, to cherish devotional feelings towards him, and to submit implicitly to his authority. It has been justly remarked that the book of Job may be said to be devoted to the object of illustrating this; and many similar statements occur in the book of Psalms, and the other devotional portions of the Scriptures. This truth, however, is taught us in Scripture, not only inferentially and by plain consequence, but in distinct and explicit doctrinal statements, as in Paul's address to the people of Lycaonia, recorded in Acts xiv. 15-17, and in the first and second chapters of his Epistle to the Romans. These statements are too clear to admit of any serious doubt as to their meaning, and should settle the point with all who admit the authority of Scripture. "And saying, *Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness*" (Acts xiv. 15-17).

The apostle's statement plainly implies that though the Lycaonians and other nations similarly situated, were not so guilty as if they had enjoyed some better opportunities of knowing the true God—as, for example, a direct supernatural revelation; yet, from the works of creation and providence, the abundant mercies they had enjoyed, they might and should have been led to know the only true God, who had made heaven and earth, to worship him and him only, and to abandon the practice of idolatry. And in the latter part of the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans,

we have the same truth still more fully and formally stated and proved. The substance of what the apostle there declares in regard to the heathen nations in general was this—First, that they were generally immersed in the grossest and most deplorable idolatry and immorality; second, that they were responsible for all this idolatry and immorality, and justly punishable on account of their conduct; and third, that the grounds of the responsibility and just liability to punishment on account of their idolatry and immorality, or, as he says, of their being inexcusable, was that from the things that were made (the works of creation), they might have known, and in a certain sense *did* know, enough of God's character and will to have convinced them that this idolatry and immorality were sinful and dangerous, and to have led them to worship God and to obey his laws. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them: for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse. Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. i. 19-21). And in the second chapter the apostle shews that a similar argument might be founded on the moral constitution of men, on the conscience which they all have within their hearts, and the possession of which ought to have led them to the knowledge of the character of God and their own duty, and rendered inexcusable the actual ignorance they manifested, and the sins of which they were guilty.



LECTURE IX.

INSUFFICIENCY OF NATURAL THEOLOGY.

AS to the second proposition, which sets forth the insufficiency of the light of nature, or of human reason, or of natural theology, which is the product of the light of nature or human reason, this can be very easily established by the statements of Scripture to those who acknowledge its authority. It is curious, however, to notice here the inconsistency of the Socinians, for while many of them have contended that men could not by their own reason establish the leading doctrines of natural theology, but must be indebted for the knowledge of them to Christ and the Scriptures, and while they have plainly been led to take this ground, because, according to their views, there was little else for which men were indebted to the Son of God and his Word, they are willing enough generally to allow that these doctrines of natural theology, or those general truths about God which have been commonly regarded as knowable by human reason, are sufficient for leading men to happiness and salvation.¹ These doctrines indeed, they think, cannot be known fully and certainly without Christ and revelation; but then Christ and revelation have done little or nothing for us except fully and clearly to reveal to us these doctrines. It was not, according to them, deficiency of the knowledge as to its extent and compass, but the mere difficulty of making it known to us, that rendered a revelation necessary; while most divines, though maintaining in opposition to the Socinians that the goodness, wisdom, and power of God are, to some extent, manifested by the light of nature and the works of creation and providence, have also held that there are truths the knowledge of which is neces-

¹ See on the immediately following Question of Turretine, Ques. iv.

sary to salvation, but which cannot be known by the unassisted reason of man, and can be learned only from revelation.

That a knowledge of the peculiar principles of Christianity as a remedial scheme, originating in God's love to men, and founded on the sufferings and death of his Son as the substitute of sinners, is necessary to men's salvation, or to their attaining to the enjoyment of God's favour and to permanent happiness, can be very easily established from the statements of Scripture; but if this subject is to be discussed with unbelievers, it must be discussed upon the principles of reason, and we must try to prove by arguments derived from that source "that the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and his will which is necessary unto salvation." Now, in adverting to this point, we must remind you that, as we have already remarked, the proof of this is not necessary as a preliminary to establishing the truth of Christianity. We can prove the truth of Christianity and the divine authority of the sacred Scriptures, without either assuming or establishing the insufficiency of reason or the necessity of revelation; and therefore, in arguing with infidels, we might supersede the discussion of this point, and proceed at once to establish the truth of the Christian revelation, and the consequent obligation to receive implicitly the whole of its information. But it is usually right, when an infidel allegation or objection can be answered *directly*, that it should be answered *directly*. The insufficiency of reason and the necessity of revelation can be, and have been, proved from principles of reason; and the process of proving this leads to some interesting and useful speculations. The direct and proper proof from reason of the insufficiency of reason and the necessity of revelation, lies mainly in the establishment of these two positions—First, it can be proved from the light of nature and the testimony of conscience, that all men have sinned or broken God's laws; second, it can *not* be proved from reason or the light of nature that men who have sinned against God's laws will, even upon repentance and amendment, escape punishment for their sins. Lord Herbert summed up natural religion, which he thought sufficient to guide men to permanent happiness, in five articles, viz.—First, that there is one supreme God; second, that he is to be worshipped; third, that piety and virtue are the principal parts of his worship; fourth,

that when we have done amiss, we must repent, and are then fully warranted to cherish the hope of pardon ; and fifth, that there are rewards and punishments for good and bad men respectively in a future life.

Now, even if it were admitted that the light of nature could discover and establish clearly and certainly, so as practically to influence men's character and conduct, that there is one supreme God, who is to be worshipped, and worshipped principally by the practice of piety and virtue, and that there is a future state of rewards and punishments, although the general state of religion and morality among nations who have not had the benefit of a divine revelation is very far from demanding or sanctioning so full an admission, still an insuperable difficulty would attach to Herbert's fourth principle, viz. that men who have sinned are entitled upon repentance to cherish the certain hope of pardon. Not that we would assert and undertake to prove *positively upon principles of reason*, that God could not, in point of fact, pardon the sins of penitent sinners, or deny that the light of nature affords any grounds for believing that God is placable and ready to forgive. But it has been often proved by the defenders of revelation—and this is sufficient—that it is impossible to reach by the light of nature, without revelation, to a certain and assured conviction that God will pardon sin ; that there is much in the state of the world, in the natural conscience of men, and in the moral government which God is actually exercising, to lead men who have not a positive revelation to entertain very serious apprehensions upon this subject ; and that, even though we might have good reason from the light of nature for believing the general position that God is merciful and placable, we could not certainly deduce from this general doctrine any firm and well-established conclusions as to the way and manner in which he would in point of fact deal with sinners, on what terms and conditions, with what accompaniments and in what circumstances he would, *if at all*, dispense pardon. If it can be proved, as has been often done conclusively, that the light of nature teaches men that they have sinned against God's laws, but that it does *not* certainly and distinctly inform them in such a way as to carry assurance to their minds that they will be pardoned upon repentance, or tell them authoritatively in what way or upon

what terms pardon is to be obtained, then it follows plainly that the light of nature is insufficient to afford men rational peace and satisfaction, to allay their doubts and fears, or to provide for them any ground on which they can securely rest in looking forward to a reckoning with God, and an entrance upon a future state of rewards and punishments. This is enough to prove that no man ought to rest satisfied with the light of nature, with the informations of reason or of natural theology, and, as if he had already attained to full certainty and assurance in regard to his relation to God and his eternal destiny, refuse to listen to any intimation of a supernatural revelation, and to examine the credentials which it produces. There is much in the condition of the world and in the constitution of man, especially in the supremacy of conscience, to prove that God exercises a moral government over us, *i.e.* that he himself loves righteousness and hates iniquity, and treats men according to their character and conduct; while at the same time there is so much of what may seem irregularity and imperfection in the actual administration of this moral government, as to force upon us the conviction that it is only a part of a great scheme that we at present behold, and that this scheme is to be more fully carried out in some different and subsequent state of existence. But while we can thus derive from the light of nature some general notions of the divine character and government, we can derive from it no very certain conclusions as to what God will actually do in certain cases, real or supposed. We see about as much evidence of God's hatred of sin as of his love of virtue, of his holiness and justice as of his benevolence and mercy; and we are therefore at a loss when by the mere light of nature we endeavour to decide how he will in point of fact ultimately and permanently deal with those who have been guilty of transgression of his laws. There is much that clearly leads us to entertain the conviction and apprehension that sin must and shall bring down punishment, and even if there were sufficiently clear grounds in the light of nature for warranting the general conclusion that God is placable (which, perhaps, cannot be very certainly established), yet this general truth of God's placability would not afford any very clear or certain grounds for the conclusion that he will in point of fact pardon sinners upon their repenting, or upon any other specific terms or

conditions which we might devise or imagine. The general consideration of the necessary imperfection of our natural knowledge of God should come in with peculiar force, and prevent our adopting any very definite conclusions with certainty, when, from the mere possession of a general character or quality which we think ourselves warranted in ascribing to him, we are disposed to draw inferences as to the way and manner in which he will act in certain circumstances; and in a matter which is at once so unspeakably important in itself, in its bearing upon our destiny and happiness, and at the same time so thickly shrouded in obscurity and uncertainty, in so far as the light of nature and the information of reason are concerned, as the actual forgiveness of sin, the ultimate fate of sinners, and the way and manner, if any, of escaping from the consequences of transgression, we should in right reason rest satisfied with nothing until we have carefully considered and fully ascertained whether or not God has himself been pleased to give us any specific information upon this infinitely important subject; and we should be ready and willing to give a fair and candid hearing, and a patient and careful consideration, to any feasible claims that may be put forth on behalf of a professed revelation from God.

Even among the defenders of revelation there has been some difference of opinion as to the amount of the evidence from the light of nature for God's placability, or the strength of the probability from reason that he will pardon sin. And it is evidently, from its very nature, one of those points on which men's general tendencies and inclinations might probably exert a considerable influence upon their opinions—the grounds of either an affirmative or a negative opinion concerning it being somewhat vague and indefinite. But the absence of clear and definite grounds to prove positively that God is ready and willing to forgive sin, is sufficient to shew that men cannot rest upon this with anything like security. And then placability, or a readiness to forgive, as a general feature of the divine character, is not enough to be a ground of hope and confidence, unless men had in addition some definite materials for ascertaining, first, that pardon would actually and in point of fact be dispensed; and second, in what way, or upon what terms or conditions, it was to be obtained.

Baxter, in the last chapter of the first part of his *Reasons of the Christian Religion*, has a chapter entitled "What natural light declareth of the mercy of God to sinners, and of the hopes and means of man's recovery;" and in this chapter he has some speculations, in which he raises pretty high the evidence from reason of God's pardoning sinners. Halyburton, in a very valuable chapter in his work on *Natural and Revealed Religion* (the tenth), which contains a very full and able discussion of this whole subject, has some animadversions upon these statements of Baxter's, in which he shews, I think, that Baxter's reasons from the light of nature for expecting or believing that sinners will be pardoned, are not by any means so clear and certain as he represents them. But Baxter did not think that the light of nature could give any assurance of pardon, or that men had any ground to believe that they would be pardoned on mere repentance. Accordingly, his very next chapter after that on which Halyburton animadverts, being the first of the second part of the work referred to, is to shew "the great need of a clearer light or fuller revelation of God's will, than all that hath been assumed before," and that chapter contains the following statements:—

"I am not satisfied, by the light of nature, how God is so far reconciled, and the ends of government and justice attained, as to deal with the world so contrary to its deserts. And while I am in this doubt of God's reconciliation, I am still ready to fear, lest present forbearance and mercy be but a reprieve, and will end at last in greater misery; however, I find it hard, if not impossible, to come to any certainty of actual pardon and salvation. Nor can I see, by nature, how a sinner can live comfortably in this world, for want of clearer assurance of his future happiness. I must therefore conclude that the light and law of nature, which was suitable to uncorrupted reason and will, and to an undepraved mind, is too insufficient to the corrupted, vitiated, guilty world, and that there is a necessity of some recovering, medicinal revelation."¹

And in his *More Reasons for the Christian Religion* he has formally argued, in opposition to Herbert, the utter want of any evidence from the light of nature that God will pardon sinners upon repentance, or that sinners, on the ground of their repentance, are warranted to expect the forgiveness of sins, just as Halyburton and many others have done.

¹ Baxter's *Reasons of the Christian Religion*, part ii. chap. i., secs. 13–20. Works, vol. xxi., pp. 132–138.

It is a remarkable coincidence that the very defect under which natural religion specially labours is just that which it was professedly the leading object of the Christian revelation to supply. If natural religion, whatever measure of light it may be fitted to cast upon the character and moral government of God and a future state, plainly teaches men that they are sinners, or transgressors of God's laws, but does not plainly teach that God will forgive sin, or distinctly point out in what way, or upon what terms, forgiveness is to be secured ; then men who have only the light of nature to guide them, even though they are making the best use of it, and indeed we might say just *because* they are making the best and fullest use of it, must be in a state of fearful anxiety and alarm as to the way and manner in which the sins they have committed are to tell upon their ultimate destiny. Now, in this state the Christian revelation presents itself to their notice, and challenges their investigation. And in doing so it holds out, as one of its leading recommendations, that it professes to give a full solution of these important and perplexing questions which natural religion could not solve. It confirms indeed all the fears and apprehensions of nature as to the intrinsic difficulties connected with the subject of the pardon of sin, and the insufficiency of repentance ; but, at the same time, it fully reveals the mercy of God, assures us of his readiness to pardon, and of his desire to save men, and unfolds to us a great scheme through which God has provided for securing this object, in full consistency with all the attributes of his nature and all the principles of his moral government, and gives us full and explicit instructions as to what we must do in order that we may escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for our sins, and attain to the enjoyment of his favour and eternal happiness. Christianity has been sometimes called by infidels a mere republication of the law of nature, and some of those who have assumed the designation of *rational* divines have been able to see little more in it than this, and have been willing to rest its claims upon the additional clearness and certainty which it gives to the doctrines of natural religion. But this is a very inadequate view of Christianity, even when viewed simply as a revelation. It is very manifest, even upon the face of it, that its leading peculiarity is, that it unfolds a remedial scheme, that it is adapted and addressed to man as a sinner—to

man viewed not merely as a creature of God's hand, and a subject of his government, but as a transgressor of his law ; and that its most peculiar and transcendent value lies in its making known to us from God himself, and upon his own authority, his merciful and gracious purposes in regard to sinful men ; the nature and character of the provision he has made for pardoning them, and the way and manner in which men individually are to obtain forgiveness. Every man who had made a right and full use of the light of nature, so as to be alive to its defects, and desirous of further information on these momentous questions on which it leaves men so much in the dark, would regard this feature, which stands out so legibly stamped upon the Christian revelation, as affording, if not a positive presumption of its truth, at least a loud call to inquire seriously into its origin, evidences, and authority, and would be determined by it to prosecute the inquiry with all earnestness and impartiality, until firmly and distinctly persuaded either that Christianity is, as it professes to be, a revelation from God to men on matters essentially involving their destiny and happiness, or else a cunningly devised fable.¹

The proper ground or basis of natural theology is just the works of creation and providence ; the works of creation, including not only inanimate objects, whether great or small, distant or at hand, but also man himself, in his physical, intellectual, and moral constitution ; and works of providence, including not only the changes or events connected with these various and innumerable objects which we ourselves have seen or observed, but those also which have been made known to us on the testimony of others. The evidence of sense, the evidence of consciousness, and the evidence of testimony, are recognised by all sane men as valid and certain sources of knowledge, as conveying to us information which it is our duty to receive and to rest upon. The reason or understanding of man, brought to bear upon those various objects and facts comprehended in the works of creation and providence, is led, in its fair and honest exercise, to the conviction of the existence of an intelligent First Cause, who has created all these objects, and who directs and superintends all these events, who is possessed of the highest moral excellence, and who is to be worshipped and obeyed. The truths thus discovered and established constitute

¹ See last chapter of Dr Chalmers's *Natural Theology*.

what is commonly called natural theology, and the truths that are thus known, or that may be known, concerning God, are quite sufficient at least to render inexcusable those who, without any other opportunities of knowing him, do not worship and serve the true God who made heaven and earth, though they are not sufficient to guide men to salvation.

Some have thought that evidence for the existence and government of God might be derived not only from the ordinary events that are constantly occurring in accordance with what seem to be the usual principles or laws that regulate the succession of events in the physical and moral worlds, but also from extraordinary or miraculous occurrences alleged to have taken place, when such events have been either observed by the senses, or established by other satisfactory evidence. It has been alleged that men have foretold that certain events would take place which could not have been foreseen by any human sagacity, and that these events so foretold have taken place in accordance with the prediction, although those who foretold them, and those in whom they were fulfilled, neither did nor could exert any influence adequate to produce them. It has also been alleged that events have sometimes taken place manifestly implying a deviation from the ordinary course of nature, and from the usual operation of those laws by which the ordinary course of nature seems to be regulated—events which the power of man could not have effected, but which yet were effected by men, or at least in obvious and designed connection with something said or done by men. Admitting that such things as these—prophecies and miracles—have been seen or observed by men, or are believed by them on the ground of satisfactory testimony, there can be no reasonable doubt that they afford good ground for the conclusion that there does exist some superior invisible power which has access to the minds of men, and which can exert some influence above and beyond what man could exert upon the objects we behold and the events we observe. Such events as these speak more plainly and explicitly of a superior invisible power than ordinary events do, but they do not of themselves, and in virtue of anything peculiar to them as distinguished from other events, tell us anything of the moral character of the power by which they are produced; nor do they of themselves, and in virtue of anything peculiar to them, lead to the

knowledge of one great intelligent Being, who is the Creator and Governor of all. Right conceptions of God, as an intelligent Being who has created and governs all things, who is possessed of exalted and unbounded knowledge, power, and wisdom, can be legitimately derived only from a survey of the world in its amplitude and variety; and right conceptions of the moral character and moral government of this one intelligent First Cause can be certainly deduced only from a comprehensive survey of the general tendencies of things, and especially from an examination of our own mental constitution. And when right conceptions of the existence, character, and moral government of God have been thus formed, they may be applied to particular objects, facts, or events, ordinary or extraordinary, so as to enable us to deduce from these particular facts or events special inferences which may be of the highest importance. In short, prophecies and miracles, when viewed in connection with the great doctrines of natural religion already established, or with a belief, resting on solid rational grounds, of the existence, character, and providence of a great First Cause, afford good grounds for inferences and conclusions which they could not fully and validly support when viewed simply as separate facts or events, or when contemplated by men who are not yet persuaded of the existence of a God of infinite excellence ruling and governing all things. This topic is intimately connected with the evidences of Christianity, and the illustration of the proof of its truth from miracles and prophecy, and will be more fully adverted to when we come to that branch of the subject.



LECTURE X.

NATURAL THEOLOGY, THE BASIS OF THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

IT may be proper, however, at present to advert generally to the connection between the doctrines of natural theology and the processes by which the truth of the Christian religion may be established. There are two questions here that ought to be distinguished. The first concerns the relation between the doctrines of natural theology and the doctrines of the Christian revelation; and the other concerns the relation between the doctrines of natural theology and the *evidences* of the Christian revelation. The latter of these subjects, though more minute and limited in extent than the other, is really and practically much the more important of the two, and for this plain reason, that when once the truth of the Christian revelation is fully established, we can easily derive from it much fuller and more certain information in regard to the character and moral government of God, a future state of rewards and punishments, and the whole subject of the duty and destiny of man, than we could possibly derive from the exercise of our faculties on the works of creation and providence. And hence the paramount importance of our being chiefly solicitous about investigating fully, and establishing thoroughly, the evidences of Christianity, and the propriety of our giving our chief attention in examining the subject of natural theology, to the bearing of its information upon the evidence or proof, rather than upon the matter or contents, of revelation. There are no doctrines concerning God and our relation to him for which satisfactory evidence has been adduced from an examination of the works of creation and providence, which are not also assumed or asserted in the Christian revelation. In the very commencement of the

Bible the existence of God is assumed or taken for granted, while his creation of the world is explicitly declared. The Bible gives much additional information concerning God beyond what the light of nature affords, especially concerning his plans and purposes with respect to the human race, the worship and duty which men are called upon to render to him, and the paths through which they may attain to permanent felicity. If Christianity be true, then we have in the Bible all the information which the light of nature has ever been supposed to afford to us, much more clearly and more fully developed ; and we have an authoritative solution of the great question which it so much concerns us to understand and apply, viz., How, or in what way, man may escape from the consequences of his sin, and may attain to forgiveness and the favour of God ? When our object is to unfold fully and systematically all that we know concerning God and his character and moral government, we can derive no great assistance from the discovery of human reason ; for if the Scripture be a divine revelation, it contains information which is at least as authentic, and much more full and complete, than even the clearest deductions of reason could furnish. In forming our full and final judgment as to the truths we ought to believe concerning the character and moral government of God, we are not dependent in the least, if Christianity be true, upon natural religion. But it is an important inquiry, Are we equally independent of the informations of natural theology, in investigating the previous question whether we are warranted to receive Christianity as a divine revelation, and to rely implicitly upon what the sacred Scriptures make known to us ? The language in which the questions that have been agitated about the authenticity of particular revelations are usually stated, seems to indicate that, according to general apprehension, the evidence by which alleged supernatural revelations should be established must be founded upon natural religion. The questions commonly put upon this subject are such as these : Did this revelation proceed from *God* ? Does the information thus conveyed to us rest upon *God's* authority ?—questions which plainly enough seem to imply that we already know something about God, and that we have some means of tracing a connection between him and information that may be communicated to us through the instrumentality of men. The claims which Moses

and which Christ himself put forth was in substance, that they were commissioned by God, and that they spoke in his name and by his authority, and they could and did expect their claims to be believed only when they produced evidence of the truth of *this* position. This position, however, is practically unintelligible to a man who has no idea of God, and no knowledge concerning him, and could not be established to the satisfaction of his understanding. The assertion then of the proposition that Christianity is a revelation *from God* seems to assume that those to whom the proposition is addressed know already something about God, by means of which they may form some judgment as to the truth of the proposition, just as the Bible opens with a statement which virtually assumes that men already know something about the existence of God, though they might not know much about the world, and God's dealings with it.

Paul began his address to the Athenians by declaring unto them the unknown God, and we can scarcely doubt that, if in any case, when setting forth the claims of his Master and of himself to be received as divine messengers, who spoke in God's name and by God's authority, he had been told by those whom he addressed, that they did not know or believe anything about God, he would have stopped, and endeavoured, by appealing to their natural reason and conscience, their natural notions, and the works of creation and providence, to have opened up to them the fundamental principles of natural theology as the basis on which to rest the proof of the divinity of his mission. The proper direct evidences of a supernatural revelation, the proper proofs of a claim which a man may put forth to be received as a messenger from God, commissioned to make known his will on miracles—miracles of knowledge and power—or prophecies, and what we more commonly call miracles, and not only the statement of the position to be proved, but the attempt to deduce from the miracles supposed or alleged to have been performed, an argument in support of it, *i.e.* an argument in support of the divine commission of the person by, or in connection with whom the miracles have been wrought, assume or imply that something is clearly known about God. Prophecies and miracles, viewed by themselves, and apart from any previous knowledge and belief of the doctrines of natural theology, do not seem to be capable of proving more than the

existence and operation of some superior invisible power. In strict reasoning they prove this, when once established as facts, because they cannot otherwise be explained or accounted for; but they do not seem capable of themselves of proving more. It is only when, along with the mere miracles, we take into account views already established, or at least entertained, upon whatever grounds, of a Supreme Being who governs everything, who is possessed of moral excellence himself, who will not deceive his creatures, or permit them to be deceived, without giving them the means of detecting the imposition, that we can deduce from the miracles the conclusion that those by whom these miracles have been performed, may be relied on as declaring what is fully entitled to our submission and obedience. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth forth his handiworks." Those who have appeared upon earth professing to be commissioned to communicate to men authoritative information concerning religious subjects, have professed to speak and act by the authority of the God who made heaven and earth, and have assumed that those whom they addressed knew something of the Being whose commission and authority they claim; and in the evidence they adduced in support of their claims, they have proceeded upon the assumption of principles involved in the views generally entertained by mankind concerning this great Being—principles which, in order to give validity to their argument, they must have proceeded to establish, unless they had been conceded to them by those whom they addressed. In dealing with professed atheists, with the view of leading them to submit to the guidance of men who profess to have been charged with the communication of a supernatural revelation, and who appeal to miracles in support of their claims, it would not seem very unreasonable in the atheists to ask for proof of the existence of the Being in whose name they profess to speak; and if they were referred to the miracles themselves for a proof at once of the existence of God, and of the validity of the claims of those who professed to have been sent by him, it does not appear how these miracles could afford any evidence of the existence of God to those who, *ex hypothesi*, had resisted all the evidence in support of this great truth derived from the ordinary works of creation and providence. Miracles indeed afford a very specific and compendious proof of the existence and operation of

some supreme invisible power, and it is possible that the proof of *this* by miracles might tend indirectly to open the eyes of atheists to the weakness of those sophisms and evasions by which they had hitherto hardened their minds against the evidence from the ordinary works of creation and providence, and thus lead to such a fair and candid consideration of this evidence as to convince them of the existence, character, and moral government of God. But it is not the less true—and this is all we at present contend for—that an admission of the fundamental principles of natural theology must be in some way produced, and must exist and be in operation, before men can be logically compelled by miracles to admit the divine commission of those by whom these miracles are performed. The fuller explanation of this must be reserved till we treat of the evidence of miracles; but we have adverted to it here that you may not suppose, that in declining to occupy much of your time with discussions on the subject of natural theology, we are insensible of its importance, especially in its bearing upon the full and thorough establishment of the argument for the truth of Christianity, which is the main source of our knowledge, the only basis of our hopes.

In accordance with a distinction formerly adverted to, we must here observe that there is a great difference between asserting the necessity of an acquaintance with the fundamental principles of natural theology in making out the evidence of Christianity, and asserting the right of natural theology to sit in judgment upon *the doctrines of Christianity*. It is indeed quite true as an abstract position, that no revelation from God can contradict those views which are deduced by reason, rightly and logically, from an examination of the works of creation and providence; but the unassisted reason of man cannot with certainty deduce a great many clear doctrines from the things that are made, and is very unable to infer, even from the general notions which it may have formed concerning God, how he may be expected to act in certain circumstances. There is no good ground for attaching much weight to the supposed deductions of reason in regard to anything like the details of the divine character and government, or judging of what, in certain circumstances, the holiness or justice of God would require or exclude, in determining beforehand what is or is not worthy of God, and fitting for him to do. One of the

plainest lessons taught us by reason as well as by revelation is, that we cannot by searching find out the Almighty unto perfection—that it is but a small part of his ways that we can know. And by means of this general doctrine we are most reasonably entitled at once to dispose of many plausible objections that may be advanced against an otherwise well-accredited revelation. We do not indeed well see how the general relevancy of all such objections can be disputed; in other words, *we admit* that if it be alleged against a professed revelation from God that it represents God as speaking and acting in a way that contradicts the doctrines learned concerning him from the works of creation and providence, it is not warrantable at once and summarily to set aside all such objections, upon the mere ground that the revelation is well established. If the revelation be well established, then all these objections can be more directly answered; and it is not unreasonable that they be so answered, at least thus far, that we prove that there is nothing in the revelation *that can be clearly shewn* to contradict the views of God which are really and clearly established by the works of creation and providence, after which we are fully entitled to resolve all further difficulty into the ignorance of man, the weakness of human reason, and the authority of the revelation on which we rest. That much more time and labour have been spent by the defenders of revelation in answering objections of this sort than their intrinsic importance demanded, is true; but we do not consider the time and labour as misspent, —and indeed such a notion would be to pronounce a sentence of utter uselessness upon the whole of Butler's *Analogy*,—were it only upon this ground, that Christianity, while professing to rest her claims mainly upon the proper direct historical evidence of the divine commission of Christ and his apostles, should not appear to shrink from any objections, but to be ever ready to meet all assailants, whatever ground they may choose to occupy.

There are, then, just two points connected with natural theology which are of much practical importance—First, that it be established that while men are sinners, and inexcusable in their ignorance of God and disobedience to his laws, it cannot be shewn from the light of nature that they can be firmly assured that God will pardon sin upon repentance, or ascertain certainly

whether or not, and upon what terms, sin will be forgiven; and second, that it be distinctly ascertained how far the informations of natural theology are necessary in order to lay a firm basis for the proof from miracles and otherwise, in support of a supernatural revelation, and that it be shewn that all that is necessary for this purpose is true and certain, while nothing certain can be produced from that source on the opposite side. The practical importance of the subject lies much more, on grounds already explained, in the second than in the first of these points, because a previous proof of the necessity of a revelation is not needful in order to establish the position that a revelation has been actually given, and because when the truth of the Christian revelation has been once satisfactorily established, we have an abundant source from which we can derive clear and certain views in regard to God's character and moral government on which we may securely rely, especially as we can easily prove that nothing revealed to us in Scripture *can be shewn* to contradict any views of God deduced in the fair use of reason from the contemplation of the works of creation and providence.

From views taught us in natural theology we deduce the probability, as well as the desirableness, of a revelation, *i.e.* we can shew that it is in the highest degree probable that God should have supernaturally communicated to men some further information concerning himself, and concerning their duty and destiny, than men usually have derived, or probably could derive, from the unassisted use of their natural faculties. It is not difficult to conceive how it is that miracles, supposing them to be attested by our senses, or established by competent testimony, do, when viewed in connection with the great doctrines of natural theology, afford satisfactory evidence of a supernatural revelation, or of the divine commission of those who profess to have been entrusted with it; while, on the other hand, it is not very easy to conceive how, *supposing* God to have intended to communicate to men a supernatural revelation of his will through the instrumentality of men, he could have provided those whom he might select as his instruments with any adequate proof to others that they were commissioned by him, and spoke in his name, except by giving them a power of working miracles, or by working miracles in connection with them, and thereby giving the seal of his attestation to their claims. And if

so, everything that illustrates the goodness and wisdom of God, in giving a supernatural revelation of his will, and confirms the probability of his doing so, equally tends to confirm the probability of miracles, and the goodness and wisdom of God in performing them. Attempts, indeed, have been made to shew from natural theology the impossibility of miracles, upon the ground that the supposition that miracles were needed or were wrought reflected upon the wisdom of God. This is a notion that has been much insisted upon by the modern anti-supernaturalists, as they are called, of Germany—men who call themselves Christians, and profess to believe, in some sense, in the Christian revelation, who yet deny altogether that miracles have ever been performed, and explain away the miracles recorded in Scripture by ascribing the events themselves wholly to natural causes, and the mode in which they are described in Scripture to an accommodation to the common modes of thinking and speaking that then prevailed. At present we have to do with the notions of these men only in so far as they deny that miracles are possible, and base their denial upon the idea that it is inconsistent with the wisdom of God that he should have recourse to miracles, thus making a doctrine deduced from natural theology to overturn, or rather to cut off beforehand the main proof of an external kind on which the truth of Christianity rests. But this is a piece of mere presumptuous speculation that has no solid foundation to rest upon.

The notion, as expressed in Wegscheider's *Institutiones Theologicæ Christianæ Dogmaticæ*, which is regarded as the text-book of infidel rationalism, is this, that a belief in a supernatural and miraculous revelation cannot be reconciled—"cum idea dei eterni semper sibi constantis, omnipotentis, omniscii, et sapientissimi" (sect. 12, p. 49). In endeavouring to establish this position, the author confounds it with another and totally distinct one—viz. this, that miracles cannot be proved. If it could be shewn that miracles could not be proved, this would certainly be a very strong presumption that no miracles have ever, in point of fact, been wrought; but it would not prove that it was in itself inconsistent with the divine wisdom that the ordinary visible course of nature and providence should ever be departed from; and accordingly the only argument he adduces really bearing upon the assertion which he made, and has undertaken to establish, is the allegation that

the idea of a miracle, and of its supposed use and necessity, implies some deficiency in the system which God appointed for the government of the world, and according to which he ordinarily acts, and is therefore precluded by right views of his immutability, omniscience, and wisdom. This is a fair specimen of the *a priori* objections commonly adduced against both the evidences and against the doctrines of the Christian religion by infidels, whether they avow their infidelity, or, like the German rationalists, or anti-supernaturalists, cloak it under a sort of profession of Christianity. Now, the best proof of the possibility of a thing is the proof that it has actually taken place. The best proof of the possibility of miracles is the proof that miracles have in point of fact been performed, and that miracles have been performed can be, and has been, proved by evidence which cannot be disposed of, except by having recourse to absolute scepticism—*i.e.* by denying that there is such a thing as truth, or that there is any possibility of ascertaining it. This, of course, is sufficient to dispose of the objection; but it is desirable, further, to shew that no sufficient evidence can be adduced that the idea of a miracle is opposed to the immutability and perfect knowledge and wisdom of God. The burden of proof, of course, lies upon those who make the objection. It is to be observed generally that it is unwarranted and presumptuous in men to be drawing inferences as to the way in which God will certainly act, from the defective and imperfect conceptions we are able to form of the general attributes of his character. To be drawing inferences of this sort implies an assumption that we thoroughly know the whole character, plans, and purposes of God, and the objects he has in view. There are many things undoubtedly occurring in the history of nature and providence which our notions of the divine perfections would not have led us to expect, and do not fully enable us to explain. The original creation of the world in time was just as much a miracle as any of these events to which that name is usually applied, and is equally inconsistent with those views of the unchangeableness and omniscience of God on which this objection is founded. Miracles to be performed at particular times for special purposes may have been, and as their defenders believed were, comprehended in God's original scheme for the administration of the affairs of this world, as much as those events which constitute its

ordinary history. The state of ignorance and darkness into which men who had no supernatural revelation did in point of fact, under God's government, fall, makes it positively probable that God should make to them a supernatural revelation of his will, and sanction it by miracles—the only evidence, so far as we can see, or at least by much the most natural and obvious species of proof, by which its authority could be established. These various considerations, which have been merely indicated or hinted at, and which might easily be expanded and illustrated, are sufficient to prove that the objection has no real weight, that it has no firm or solid basis on which men are entitled to take their stand, and furnishes no sufficient reason why they should refuse to give a candid and patient attention to the actual proofs by which we profess to establish the position that miracles have been wrought, and wrought in such circumstances as to establish the truth and certainty of the Christian revelation. And this is all that we are called upon to do in dealing with such an objection.

The allegation that miracles, even admitting that they might possibly be wrought, could not possibly be rationally proved so as to command our assent, does not belong to the subject of natural theology, inasmuch as the alleged impossibility of proving miracles, as distinguished from the alleged impossibility of their taking place, does not profess to rest upon any allegation as to the character and moral government of God, but only on certain allegations as to the constitution and faculties of man, and the grounds and sources of the knowledge which he can acquire; and therefore we shall not at present advert to it.

There is no ground, then, for maintaining that anything can be fairly and clearly deduced from the doctrines of natural theology that is destructive of, or even unfavourable to, the proofs or evidences of a supernatural revelation; while, on the contrary, natural theology makes discoveries and suggestions which make it positively probable that God should make a supernatural revelation, and of course that he should do everything such as the performance of miracles, which is fitted to convince men of the reality of the revelation he may have made.

The existence, attributes, and moral government of God may be said to form the basis of all religion, and hence the importance and necessity of your having clear and impressive conceptions of

all that can *in any way* be learned about *him*, and of the certainty of your knowledge, and the grounds on which it rests. The great end of man “is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.” To “glorify God” implies that you know him, that you are acquainted with his character, that what you do know of him is deeply impressed upon your minds, and that all you have really learned concerning him is producing its proper practical effect in regulating your sentiments and feelings in regard to him. This, and this only, is glorifying God. It was with this view, and for this purpose, that God has made himself known to men, and with a view to this object are men bound to exercise their faculties in acquiring a knowledge of God, and in applying the knowledge which they may have acquired. To “enjoy God for ever” implies that you know the relation in which you stand to him, the worship and the duty which he requires of you, and that you act in accordance with the knowledge you may attain upon these points. God has regulated his works of creation and providence with an express reference to the object of making himself known to his creatures, that they might glorify him, and all the supernatural revelations which he has made of himself to men were directed to the same object. One purpose for which He who was the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of his person became a partaker of flesh and blood, and tabernacled upon earth, was that he might reveal to us the Father.

We have a remarkable statement connected with this subject in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, verse 6th:—“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” This faith that is necessary to please God is not necessarily dependent upon a supernatural revelation which God may have given concerning himself. All knowledge of God—an unseen being not cognisable by our senses—provided it be real and efficacious, may be called faith, and right views of God and of our relation to him, from whatever source derived, are indispensable to our enjoying his favour and attaining to true happiness. “He that cometh to God,” in the apostle’s language, just means he who desires so to worship and serve God as to attain to the enjoyment of his favour; and in order to the gratification of this desire, and the attainment of this object, it is

indispensable as the basis and foundation of all that he be convinced and really believe that there is a God, and that he rewards them that seek him. The belief, then, in the existence and moral character and government of God is the foundation of all religion, of all acceptable worship and service of him, and it is of primary importance that this foundation be well laid and thoroughly secured, that men do know and thoroughly understand, as far as their feeble faculties admit of it, all that can be known concerning him, and make it their constant study to increase and extend this knowledge, to be more deeply impressed with its truth and certainty, and to be ever applying it to the promotion of piety and holiness.

We are accustomed to speak of the doctrines of the existence, character, and moral government of God, and a future state of rewards and punishments, with the obligations of worship and obedience which are founded on these truths, as the doctrines and duties of natural religion, because we can derive *some* information concerning them from the light of nature and the exercise of our natural faculties; and perhaps on this very account there is something of a tendency in some men to regard them with little interest, as but simple and elementary truths when compared with what are regarded as the peculiar doctrines and the higher mysteries of revelation. In a certain sense and in a certain aspect, there is some truth in this notion; but it is apt to be perverted and misapplied, and *it is* perverted and misapplied whenever it leads men to forget or to fail in fully realising the truth that right views of the character of God and of his relation to us, are indeed the foundation of all true religion, whether regarded as a mere system of doctrine, or as a means of forming the character and regulating the conduct. Those indeed very imperfectly comprehend and very greatly injure the Christian revelation, who represent it as being little more than a republication of the law of nature. But it should not be forgotten that one object of Christianity, viewed as a revelation, was to make known to us more fully the character of God, and our relation to him, that thus we might be effectually led to worship and glorify him as God, and be duly thankful for all his mercies. One reason, though certainly a subordinate one, why Christ came into the world, was that he might reveal to us the Father, and bring life and immortality to light by his gospel,

and one use therefore which we ought to make of all that we have learned concerning Christ, and of all that he has by word or deed made known to us, is that we may be fully enlightened in the knowledge of God, and may be led to glorify him in our bodies and in our spirits, which are his.

Though the doctrines concerning God are in some measure discoverable by natural reason, they are much more fully opened up to us in the Christian revelation; but with all the additional light there cast upon the divine character, it remains true that the knowledge of God is the foundation of all true religion, as including at once the acceptable worship of God and due obedience to his will. The knowledge of Jesus Christ, as well as the knowledge of God, is indeed necessary to eternal life; and men, that they may know God aright, must see him as he is revealed in the face of his Son. But yet it is true, that unless their eyes have been opened to behold the glory of God, they are still walking in darkness; unless they are animated by the fear of God, they have not yet reached the beginning of wisdom; and that unless they are walking with God, realising his presence, contemplating his perfection, reverencing his power and majesty, relying upon his mercy and faithfulness, and acknowledging him in all their ways, they have not yet been adopted into his family, and they are not yet preparing for his presence. You are not, then, to regard this knowledge of God's character and government as elementary and comparatively unnecessary, because it may be derived in some measure from natural reason. It was one object of Christ's mission, and of the Christian revelation, to open it up more fully, and to impress it more deeply, and the way in which this knowledge of God is set before us in the Christian revelation, in connection with the manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh and the great ends of his mission, is that which in the hand of the Spirit is to be the great means of changing our natures and sanctifying our souls. And hence the imperative duty of our diligently and faithfully employing the revelation by Christ and concerning Christ, for the purpose of leading us to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and to cherish habitually right impressions of his perfections and his providence, of his character and his government. Our Saviour charged the Sadducees with erring, because they knew not the Scriptures nor the power

of God, and men may still fall into great errors, both theoretical and practical, not merely from ignorance of the Scriptures, but also because, in combination with this, they are ignorant of the divine perfections and government, because they do not fully understand, realise, and apply what God has made known to them in his works and in his word concerning the perfections which he possesses and manifests, and the principles by which his government of the world is regulated.

[Again recommend Butler's *Analogy* and Chalmers's *Natural Theology*.]



LECTURE XI.

IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT OF THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

HAVING very briefly explained to you the general character of natural theology, and the grounds on which it rests, rather for the purpose of assisting you in understanding its general position in theological science, and the references which you will often find to it in theological works, than with any intention of discussing it, and having adverted to the connection subsisting between the doctrines of natural theology and the proof by which the truth of Christianity is established, we now proceed to consider the proof of the truth of Christianity itself. And here let me briefly explain to you the object I have in view in treating of this subject. I have no intention of expounding fully the evidence of Christianity, as if my object and my business were to convince *you* that Christianity is true, and to draw out all its proofs in detail in order to produce that conviction in *your* minds. You are already convinced of the truth of Christianity, and you have, I trust, been the subjects of such changes and experiences as to know something of that witness in yourselves which the Scriptures tell us believers have, which should satisfy you that Christianity cannot be a cunningly devised fable, and fully preserve you from the assaults of infidelity. But the evidence of Christianity forms an important department of theological literature, and it is right that you should acquire some knowledge of it. It is the duty of Christians in general to be able to give to him that asketh them “a reason of the hope that is in them.” It is peculiarly the duty of ministers to be able to defend the truth of their religion in opposition to gainsayers, to remove doubts and difficulties, and to unfold, whenever they may be called upon, the grounds and reasons upon which they urge men to

receive Christ as their Saviour and their master. You are bound to acquire such a knowledge of the evidences by which the truth of Christianity may be established as to fit you for the discharge of this duty, and my business is to see that you acquire this knowledge, and to assist you in the acquisition of it. You ought to read some of the best works that have been written in proof of the truth of Christianity, and carefully to digest them. You are to make yourselves somewhat acquainted with the way in which infidels have assailed Christianity, and the evidence on which it rests, and to see that by study and meditation you fully apprehend and can distinctly explain the grounds on which their objections can be refuted, and on which, notwithstanding all the objections that have been raised, the truth of Christianity can be satisfactorily established. All these things are to be found in books, and it is chiefly by the perusal of books, and by meditation upon their contents, that you must make yourselves acquainted with them. A vast deal, as might be supposed, has been written upon the subject of the evidences of Christianity. On the discussion of no subject, indeed, have more talent and learning been brought to bear; and if my object was to bring out fully the evidence of Christianity, as if for the purpose of convincing *you* of its truth, it would be an easy matter to occupy the whole session with a summary or abridgment of what has been written in vindication of the various branches of Christian evidence, and in refutation of the different objections which have been adduced against it. But this I would reckon a waste of my time, as well as of yours. It is needless for me to be going fully over here what you can easily find in abundance of works to which your attention may be directed, as fully and conclusively argued, as thoroughly established by facts and reasoning, and as impressively illustrated as the human faculties admit of. One of the most able of the living writers on the Christian evidences has truly said—

“It would be strange indeed, and much to be lamented as well as wondered at, if the uninterrupted efforts of 1800 years had left much to be gathered in the field of evidence. A few ripe and fruitful ears may have been forgotten in haste, or overlooked by carelessness; but the riches of the harvest must long have been gathered by the first and most assiduous reapers, nor can we expect to employ ourselves in any other or more useful labour than that of sifting the produce, and ascertaining its aggregate amount. Still more idle would it be to study to be difficult, in hope of being counted as profound.

Difficulty is in itself no essential mark of excellency, and the wise providence of God has so ordained that the most valuable truths are usually the most simple and easy to be understood.”¹

It is true indeed that the assaults of infidels upon Christianity and its evidences must be met and exposed, as they have always been, whatever variety of form or aspect they may assume, and from whatever quarter the attack may be made. But nothing of any great importance requiring special notice or attention has recently appeared against the evidences of Christianity. It is true also that occasionally a man of extraordinary powers is raised up, who casts the irradiations of genius over a subject that might seem to be exhausted, and brings out in more striking and vivid light than had ever before been exhibited some of the facts and the reasonings on which the Christian argument rests. And of this we have reason to thank God that we have an instance in him who recently presided over theological education in this institution, whose sudden removal from the midst of us we all still deeply deplore, and whom it were needless and perhaps unbecoming in me formally to eulogise. The evidences of Christianity had long been with Dr Chalmers a favourite subject of study. He brought all the powers of his mind to bear upon it, and after the most mature and deliberate reflection he gave his views upon the subject to the world in two volumes of his works, entitled, *On the Miraculous and Internal Evidences of the Christian Revelation, and the Authority of its Records*. Dr Chalmers' work on this subject is in many respects the fullest and the best book on the Christian evidence in the English language. And it will be our text-book in this, the first division of our course. It is my duty to see that you make yourselves acquainted with the leading principles on which the truth of Christianity is established. I know no work where *all* the leading topics that enter into the Christian argument are set forth in a way at once so conclusive, so interesting, and so impressive; and I know no means by which I can secure that you will be so speedily and so thoroughly furnished, either in point of knowledge or impression, with nearly all that is essential upon this question, as by seeing that you have mastered it. It is but an outline of the leading principles of the subject that can be

¹ Benson's *Hulsean Lectures* for 1820 on “The Evidences of Christianity,” &c., Discourse iii. p. 54.

given here, either by lectures or by examinations on a text-book, the filling up of the details, and especially the acquiring a knowledge of, and the fixing in your minds many of those matters of fact on which some parts of the proof depend, must come from your own reading of the books in which they are fully explained. All I propose to do in this branch of the subject, in addition to making such observations and explanations as the text-book may suggest or call for, and pointing out where fuller and more detailed information upon particular topics may be obtained, is just to give a brief statement of the outline of the argument, of the general nature and import of the different parts or branches of which it consists, and of the way and manner in which they stand related to each other.

My business is to bring before you the best and most useful matter that may be accessible upon the different topics with which it is necessary for you to be acquainted, and to assist you in understanding and applying it; and it would be a waste of time to occupy you at any length with expositions of my own upon subjects which have been much better discussed in works which ought at anyrate to be perused and studied by you.

In proceeding to consider the general subject of the evidences of Christianity, the first thing to be attended to, as in most discussions about subjects that are controverted, is the *state of the question*, or the precise and exact statement of what it is that is asserted on the one side and denied on the other. Now, the question of the truth of Christianity is not the same as that of the divine authority and inspiration of the sacred Scriptures. Christianity might be true, even although the Scriptures were not or could not be proved to be inspired by God as an infallible directory to guide us, and although we could have learned what Christ taught only from some other and less perfect source,—though it should be observed that the converse of this position does not hold good. In other words, we cannot establish the divine origin and inspiration of the books of Scripture without thereby proving the truth of Christianity. This distinction between the question of the truth of Christianity and that of the divine authority of the sacred Scriptures ought to be kept in view, because it aids us in rightly understanding the arrangement and connection of the different branches of the Christian evidence, and because it enables

us more clearly to comprehend the merits of a controversy, to be afterwards adverted to, which has been carried on between some who concur in admitting not only the truth of Christianity, but even the divine authority of the Scriptures. On the discussions carried on between the Church of Rome and the Reformers on the question, How do we know and prove the Scriptures to be the Word of God? the arguments of the Reformers have, we think, been sometimes misunderstood and misrepresented, from its being supposed that this question was identical with the other, viz., How do we prove the truth of Christianity?

The question, then, about the truth of Christianity is just this: Were the claims of Jesus Christ and of his apostles to be received as divine messengers, specially commissioned by God, and authorised to speak in his name, valid, or were they not? Now, in stating the question in this way, you observe it is assumed that Jesus Christ and his apostles existed, and existed in the time and place usually understood and believed, *i.e.* in the land of Judea, about 1800 years ago, and did then and there put forth claims to be received as divine messengers, who were commissioned to make known God's will to men. This is assumed, because it is conceded by the great body of infidels, *i.e.* of those who maintain that these claims, which they admit to have been put forth, were not valid or well-founded. There have, indeed, been a few persons who, in the bitterness of their hatred to the truth, or in mere wanton recklessness, have affected to doubt or deny that such a person as Jesus Christ ever existed,—a notion scarcely worthy of exposure, though it seems to have suggested the idea of a very clever and ingenious pamphlet published anonymously, but understood to have been written by Dr Whately, the present distinguished Archbishop of Dublin, entitled, *Historical Doubts about the Existence of Napoleon Bonaparte*. Few infidels, however, have hesitated to concede that Christ and his apostles appeared in Judea about 1800 years ago, and put forth these claims. They have conceded this, just because they could not deny it without overthrowing all faith in history, and all the ordinary principles by which men of common sense are influenced. For not only is this attested by heathen historians, who are reckoned good authorities, and are therefore credited in other matters, but the whole history of literature, the whole history of the Church, and of the nations of Europe for the last

1800 years, may be said to attest it ; for the whole series of events, civil and ecclesiastical, and the whole series of literary productions establish or assume both an infinite number of particular facts and circumstances, and also a general state of matters in regard to almost everything in which men's minds have been interested in every subsequent age, which necessarily imply, and therefore prove, that about the time and place specified these men existed, these claims were put forth, were admitted by some and rejected by others, and gradually gained, in the face of much opposition and persecution, an ascendancy over the Roman empire or the civilized world. All Christians, of course, assert and maintain that the claims put forth by Christ and his immediate followers to be received as expressly commissioned by God, were valid and well-founded—in other words, that these men were specially sent by God, explicitly authorised by him to make known his will to men, and that therefore we are bound to receive, as coming immediately from God, and as resting upon his authority, whatever it can be proved that they taught in his name. This view of the matter has not been universally adopted—in other words, it has been made a subject of controversial discussion. The claims which Christ and his immediate followers put forth, to be received as divine messengers authorised to reveal God's will to men, were received and submitted to by many, but they were also rejected by many. Their claims have been since admitted by the great majority of those who in every age and country have been most eminently distinguished for talent and learning, for piety and moral worth ; but there have always been some who denied and resisted them, and exerted all their ingenuity to prove them to be unfounded. Attacks are made from time to time upon the Christian evidences which it is needful to answer. Infidels are occasionally met with in society whose objections may need to be confuted, and hence the propriety of ministers of the gospel being familiar with the grounds on which the truth of Christianity may be established, and the objections that have been adduced against it answered.

Those who may come forward to claim the submission and obedience of men, upon the ground that they have been commissioned by God and authorised to make known his will, are, of course, bound to produce their credentials, to set before men sufficient and satisfactory evidence that God *has* commissioned

them ; and this Christ and his immediate followers professed to do. While they claimed to be received as divine teachers, and called upon men to listen and submit to their instructions, they produced evidence by which they thought that men ought to be satisfied, and by which, in point of fact, many were satisfied, that God did sanction and authorise their teaching. And it is still true that the *onus probandi* lies upon those who assert that Christianity is a divine revelation, and call upon men to submit to it. When ministers call upon men to receive Christ as their Saviour and Master, they of course assume that he is entitled to these characters ; in other words, that the claims he put forth were well-founded ; and if this should be questioned or denied by those whom they address, it would be their duty, in suitable circumstances, to prove and establish it. But while the *onus probandi* lies upon the defenders of Christianity, and while they are bound to establish the validity of the claims put forth by its founders, they are not bound to remove every difficulty that may be started, or to refute every cavil that may be brought forward. We believe many things, on the ground that the proper direct evidence in support of them is valid and satisfactory, and cannot be answered, while yet there may be difficulties connected with the things themselves, or with the proof on which they rest, which may not admit of being thoroughly explained when taken by themselves, but which yet afford no sufficient reason why the body of direct proof that has not been and cannot be directly assailed, should be disregarded or set aside. So it is in regard to the evidences of Christianity. Innumerable cavils have been adduced against it ; and even though some of these, *taken by themselves*, could not be very fully explained and answered, this would be no reason why its claims should be rejected, so long as the body and substance of the proper direct proof on which they rest remained untouched. You will find, on investigating this subject, that infidels have seldom or never grappled, fairly and face to face, with the proper direct evidences, historical and miraculous, on which the claims of the Christian revelation are based, but have commonly contented themselves with discussing inferior and subordinate points, which scarcely, if at all, affect the proper substance of the question under discussion. No infidel has ever attempted a formal and regular answer to any of the leading

works in which the evidence for the truth of Christianity was fully brought out. Every infidel work of the least importance or plausibility has been answered fully and thoroughly in all its parts. But no attempt has ever been made to give anything like a regular answer to such works as Grotius' *De Veritate Religionis Christianæ*, Leslie's *Short and Easy Method with the Deists*, Butler's *Analogy*, Paley's *Evidences*, and many others. Particular statements contained in these books may have been animadverted upon by infidel writers; but the books themselves, as a whole, and the general scope and substance of their arguments, have never been directly assailed. Infidel authors have generally confined themselves to the discussion of some one particular branch or topic in the Christian evidences; and though there are some favourite objections which few infidel authors, whatever be the proper subjects of their own works, pass by unnoticed, yet none of them has ever attempted to exhibit, at one view and in one work, the whole substance of the arguments on the ground of which Christianity has been attacked, and by which the proof of its truth may be overturned. The reason of this plainly is, that an attempt of this sort would compel them, in common decency, to look the whole body and substance of the proper direct evidence of Christianity more fairly in the face than they reckon at all safe or expedient. And accordingly, while we can point to many works in which the whole evidence for Christianity has been set forth and illustrated, there is not, so far as I know or recollect, any one single infidel work in which the whole substance of the arguments against it, and of the answers to the different departments of the proof in support of it, is to be found embodied. It is precisely for the same reason that infidel authors have seldom engaged in regular controversy with those who have defended Christianity against them; and that when they have attempted any answer to what had been written in reply to them, they have not scrupled to be guilty of the most deliberate and impudent evasions of the whole substance of what had been written against them, and have adverted only to some incidental and subordinate points; in other words, they have cavilled, but not answered. Scarcely any work has ever been written against the truth of Christianity which has not been conclusively convicted, not merely of ignorance, blunder-

ing, and sophistry, but of deliberate and intentional dishonesty in misstating facts, in perverting texts, and in misrepresenting arguments ; and *this* is the explanation of the fact that infidels have so seldom attempted anything like a fair and honest discussion, by trying to answer fully and formally the works that have been written in reply to them. Among the numerous authors who wrote more or less openly against the truth of Christianity in England, in the early part of last century, scarcely any one attempted to answer the many able and learned works which were written in reply to them, and in which every one of them was convicted not only of error, but of dishonesty. Some of them wrote infidel works *after* their former books had been answered ; but they generally found it more convenient to try to cavil upon some other topic than to defend their former cavils which had been fully exposed. David Hume, as we learn from a letter of his published in the preface to Campbell's *Dissertation on Miracles*, assigned as the reason for his not answering Campbell, that "he had a fixed resolution in the beginning of his life always to leave the public to judge between his adversaries and him, without making any reply." This was certainly a very judicious resolution in the defender of a bad cause, though, as Campbell observes, Hume did not always adhere to it, and it has been pretty generally acted upon by the defenders of infidelity.

Among the numerous English infidels of the early part of last century, there are but two exceptions of any importance to this observation, and they certainly confirm the rule. Collins, in his *Scheme of Literal Prophecy*, professed to reply to the works which had been written in answer to his *Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* ; and Morgan, in the latter part of his *Moral Philosopher*, professed to reply to the answers which had been given to the preceding parts of it ; but in both cases these infidels, instead of making a frank and manly attempt to grapple with the main substance of what had been written against them, merely laboured to involve in doubt or obscurity some of the collateral or subordinate parts of the argument, or tried to escape by stating new cavils and difficulties on some other topics. So it has always been, more or less, with the advocates of error in every controversy, down to that which terminated in the

Disruption of the Established Church of Scotland. They have either declined altogether to answer what was written in defence of truth, though they may have continued to write on the other side, which may be a very different thing from answering; or, if they have attempted to answer, they have commonly grappled only with details, and have evaded the main strength and substance of the arguments.

We have admitted that the defenders of Christianity are bound to take the burden of proof in the discussion of the validity of its claims; but, on the other hand, infidels are bound to state, distinctly and explicitly, their negation of the truth of Christianity, and to grapple fairly and fully with the whole of the direct and proper evidence which the defenders of Christianity may adduce. Those who refuse to admit the claims of Christianity to be received as a revelation from God, must be held to assert and maintain, as the only intelligible explanation of their position, that Jesus Christ and his immediate followers gave no satisfactory evidence that they were commissioned by God, that their claims to divine authority were unfounded; or, in other words, as they unquestionably advanced these claims, that they were either enthusiasts or fanatics, who believed, without ground and reason, that they were divinely commissioned; or else imposters, who asserted what they knew to be false. It is painful to those who regard Christ and his apostles with the respect and reverence to which they are entitled, to state such a position, even in the explanation of an argument; but if the evidences of Christianity are to be discussed, we must fairly contemplate and describe the case and the position of those who deny its truth; and we are persuaded that it is of some practical importance, in order to our rightly comprehending this subject, and being duly impressed with it, that we should rightly conceive and fully realise what is necessarily implied in the denial, or even in the non-admission, of the truth of Christianity. If Christ and his apostles were not divinely commissioned teachers, they must have been either enthusiasts, who imposed upon themselves, or imposters who endeavoured to impose upon others. This is the only alternative, and it is right and expedient that this consideration should be ever remembered and realised when considering the subject of the evidences of Christianity, for it contributes to preserve a right

impression of what is the true nature of the question at issue, and of the momentous results that depend upon its decision ; and it also renders us some assistance in forming a right estimate and a just impression of the force and bearing of the different arguments that may be brought forward on both sides of the question.

It is peculiarly important in the present day to keep this distinctly before our minds as the true and only alternative in the discussion of this subject, because the great distinguishing peculiarity of the infidel rationalism or neology of Germany is, that it labours to overturn the whole foundations of the Christian evidence, and to deprive us of all proof of a direct supernatural revelation from God, without directly and openly assailing the character of Christ and his apostles, without charging them with being either imposters or enthusiasts. The conclusion upon this subject to which their statements and arguments commonly point is something of this sort, that our Saviour, though not holding any special divine commission, or favoured with any peculiar supernatural communications, was a man of high powers and of great excellence, who, by the exercise of his own talents, and under ordinary providential guidance, attained to and promulgated more correct and enlightened views concerning God and duty than previously prevailed. He was thus a great benefactor of the human race, like Confucius or Socrates, and his instructions mark a great era in the development of truth, and in the enlightenment of mankind. Some of them admit that he spake and acted occasionally under the influence of enthusiasm or self-deceit, and that he sometimes practised a little upon the ignorance and credulity of his countrymen ; while others explain the facts and statements upon which these conclusions are based by the supposition of his really sharing largely in the ignorance and error that prevailed around him. Still, both classes in general profess great respect for his character, and abjure the idea of his being an imposter. And hence the importance, in dealing with these men, of shewing that, whatever they may find it convenient to profess or pretend, their fundamental principles necessarily imply that Christ and his apostles were imposters, putting forth claims which they must have known to be false. And when this is established, German rationalism is fully identified with ordinary

vulgar infidelity, to be assailed and refuted on the same obvious and well-known grounds by which the truth of Christianity has been usually demonstrated.¹

In discussing the truth of the Christian revelation, we have to deal in reality or by supposition with men who deny it, or at least are not yet persuaded of it, and who, of course, if they have any opinions or convictions upon the subject, believe that the claims put forth by Christ and his apostles were unfounded; and in dealing with such men, we must argue upon principles common to Christians and to unbelievers. We must assume nothing which they deny or do not admit, without proving it, or producing satisfactory evidence of its truth. We cannot argue with any man unless he and we have some common principles—some common standard to which we both appeal. The ultimate common standard or first principle that obtains among rational men, and must be the basis of all reasoning, is the sufficiency or adequacy of our natural powers and faculties for acquiring knowledge or ascertaining truth; or, in other words, the truth and certainty of those things which we learn from the proper and legitimate use of our faculties, from sense, and consciousness, and reason. Those who do not admit this first principle or common standard, are unworthy of attention or argument; they are beyond the reach of reasoning, and should be at once set aside as impudent propounders of paradoxes which they do not themselves believe, or as destitute of mental sanity. When, however, this first principle or ultimate common standard is admitted, we can fully establish, in opposition to atheists and pantheists, the great doctrines of natural religion—the existence, character, and moral government of God; or prove to them satisfactorily that they are bound to admit these things as true. And it is in this state of matters, and with the great doctrines of natural theology admitted or conceded on both sides, that we usually proceed to consider the question of the truth of Christianity—the question whether or not Christ and his apostles were indeed sent into the world immediately by the great God, who rules and governs all things, and were commissioned by him to make known his will to men. If there be such a being as we commonly understand by the name God, it is surely possible that

¹ French's translation of Tholuck's *Essay on the Credibility of the Evangelical History*, in reply to Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, c. iii. pp. 50–53.

he may directly and supernaturally reveal his will to man by the instrumentality of men. There is nothing in this beyond the limits of his power, and there is nothing in it that can be proved to be inconsistent with anything which, without a revelation, we know concerning the perfections of his character, the principles of his government, and the relation in which he stands to us. Nay, from all we know of him, viewed in connection with the ordinary condition exhibited by men who have not had any supernatural revelation of his will, it seems highly probable that he should reveal himself to men, and give them full and authentic information about the path of duty and the way to happiness. And therefore the proper question is this, Has he, in point of fact, made such a revelation of himself to men, through the instrumentality of men? And more particularly, Did he expressly commission Christ and his immediate followers to speak to men in his name, and to make known to them his will? Was this done, and can it be proved? Christ and his apostles put forth a claim to this effect. Did they produce evidence of this claim sufficient to establish it? Has this evidence been preserved, and is it still sufficient to satisfy us of the truth of their claims? And if so, what was the information which in God's name and by his authority they communicated. These are great and momentous questions, in regard to which we should be all able, not only to express a firm and decided opinion, but to explain and unfold, when duly called upon, the grounds and the reasons by which we maintain and defend it.



LECTURE XII.

DIVISIONS OF THE EVIDENCE—MODE OF APPROACHING THE
SUBJECT—GENUINENESS, AUTHENTICITY, OR GENERAL
CREDIBILITY—NECESSITY OF SPECIAL EVIDENCE FOR
SPECIAL CLAIMS TWOFOLD.

BEFORE proceeding to give a brief outline of the topics comprehended under these different heads, we must advert to the distinction between the evidence by which a believer may convince an unbeliever of the truth of Christianity, and the evidence which the believer himself has or may have of its truth. A man who has been convinced of the truth of Christianity, and of the divine origin and authority of the Bible, *and who has given practical effect to this conviction* by really submitting his understanding and his heart to the revelation there given of the will of God for man's salvation, has evidences of the truth of Christianity, and of the divine origin of the Bible opened up to him, which may and should be, upon rational grounds, most satisfactory to himself, though they do not possess the same direct and immediate power in convincing, or at least silencing, an unbeliever. They consist chiefly in the manifestations of the divine glory, majesty, and wisdom, which he is now enabled to see in that word which God has magnified above all his works, and in the effects which, through this word, have been produced upon his own mind and character. The first of these is usually called "the self-evidencing power of the Bible"—a quality indeed which attaches to the Bible, and exists in it, whether men see it or not, but which is fully seen and perceived only by those who, having embraced the truth, are living under the guidance of the Spirit of truth. The second is what is commonly called "the

witness of the Spirit," and may be classed under the general head of the experimental evidence. These evidences are not only the best safeguards to believers against the assaults of infidelity, but they may rationally impress the minds of unbelievers, and we have no doubt are often—perhaps we might say most commonly—employed by the Spirit of God for that purpose; but they are distinguished from what are commonly reckoned the more direct and proper proofs of the truth of Christianity and the divine authority of the Bible by this, that the unbeliever may more easily evade them; that he cannot by the use of them be so certainly driven into a corner, and compelled, in the application of strict reasoning, based upon principles mutually held or conceded, to assent to the truth of Christianity, and the authority of its records. These branches of proof bear more upon the divine authority of the Scriptures than the general truth of Christianity, and will therefore be afterwards adverted to.

It has been common for writers on this subject to divide the evidences of Christianity into different heads or branches. They have most commonly been classed under the three divisions of external, internal, and experimental; and this classification, though, as Dr Chalmers observes (book iii, chap. 1), it is not easy to define very precisely at all points the limits between the different departments, is convenient and useful. The external evidence comprehends everything that can be adduced in support of the truth of Christianity from the condition and circumstances, the character and the deeds, of the men who first proclaimed it; or, in other words, the proof which they themselves adduced and exhibited of their being divinely commissioned, as the ground or basis on which they called upon those whom they addressed to receive their instruction, and to submit to their teaching and directions. This proof consisted in the miracles wrought by them, and in prophecies fulfilled in them, or uttered by them and afterwards fulfilled; and, as discussed and investigated *now*, includes of course an examination of the evidence we have for the reality and truth of these alleged miracles and prophecies. The internal evidence consists of the proof that may be derived from the revelation itself which they professed to communicate in God's name, that it really came from God, the evidence which the Christian revelation contains within itself—in the discoveries it makes, in

the doctrines it unfolds, in the character it prescribes, and the duties it enjoins—of its divine origin.

The experimental evidence comprehends everything bearing upon the question of the truth of Christianity derived from its history and actual results, from what it has actually effected upon the character and condition of men, collectively and individually. The evidences of Christianity may be all comprehended under one or other of these heads, and these different divisions fall naturally to be discussed in the order in which they have now been stated.

The substance of what is conceded by the opponents of Christianity, and conceded by them, as we formerly explained to you, because it could not be denied without overturning the foundations of all faith in past events, is this, that about 1800 years ago a remarkable person appeared in Judea, claiming to be received as a messenger from God, authorised to make known his will; that he professed to work miracles in support of his claims, and was at last publicly put to death; that his immediate followers put forth the same claims in behalf of their master and themselves, asserted that he was raised from the dead, professed themselves to work miracles, endured the greatest hardships, and at last many of them suffered death, because of the claims which they put forth; that many believed in the validity of the claims of the founder of this religion and his immediate followers, and endured persecution and death rather than renounce their connection with them; and that the religion which professed to rest upon this basis was soon widely diffused over the world, was received and adopted by vast multitudes, and at length gained the ascendancy over the Roman empire. All this is conceded as matter of fact by infidels, because it is either expressly asserted by heathen or pagan authors, such as Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny, and Lucian, with whose testimony you ought to be acquainted, or else is necessarily implied in facts or events which are notorious and unquestionable. All this being known and admitted, men who wish to investigate the validity of these claims, the truth of this religion, will naturally proceed to consider what means we have of acquiring information concerning the persons *by whom*, and the circumstances *in which*, these claims were advanced, the evidences by which they were at the time supported, and the

reception they met with. Their attention will then be directed to certain books which have been transmitted to us, and are now in our possession, and which profess to contain the records of these matters by the parties most immediately connected with them, and consisting more particularly of four different histories of the life of the founder of this religion, of a history of the proceedings of his followers after his death by one who professed to be an eye-witness of much that he records, and of a number of letters or epistles professing to be written by some of the earliest and most active propagators of the religion. If these books were really written by the persons to whom they are commonly ascribed, whose names they bear, and at the time in which they profess to have been written, *i.e.* contemporaneously with the events they describe, they may be expected to give us important information concerning the whole state of matters.

This leads us at once to the consideration of the subject of the genuineness of the books which compose the New Testament, *i.e.* the question as to whether or not these books, not at present adverted to them in detail and individually, but in the gross, were written by the authors whose names they bear, and at or about the time when they profess to have been written; in other words, whether they were written by the original propagators of Christianity, and contemporaneously with the events they record. And the first and most obvious consideration that occurs upon this topic is, that there is not a shadow of ground to doubt this—not a vestige of reason for disputing the genuineness of these books. There is nothing either in the books themselves, or in anything we know concerning their history and transmission, that indicates a later age, or throws the least suspicion upon the idea that they were written by those whose names they bear—persons contemporary with the events they record, and closely connected with them.

This of itself is a strong proof of the genuineness of the books, for experience fully proves that it is no easy matter to forge books which are to pass as having been written in an earlier age—especially when the books describe many ordinary affairs and historical transactions; and when we have *other* authentic information about the state of matters in that age and country—without introducing into them some materials by which the forgery

may be detected. In almost every case where there has been any reason to suspect that any ecclesiastical writing had been forged in a later age than that in which its alleged author lived, or in which it is said to have been written, the forgery has been detected and proved by the discovery, either in the external history of the work, or more frequently in its statements and language, of what clearly proved that it was the production of a later age. The Church of Rome has forged many pretended writings of fathers and decrees of councils to support her doctrines and her claims; but the forgeries have been detected, *i.e.* it has been established, generally by internal evidence, that there were plain indications that they were written in a later age (Comber). The strength of the evidence by which the forgery was proved varied considerably in different instances, but in very many cases it was quite sufficient to satisfy every unprejudiced mind. And in one remarkable case—that of the Decretal Epistles, as they are called—the forgery has been so conclusively established, that all Romanists of learning have been forced to admit it, though these epistles were quoted as genuine for 700 years before the Reformation, even by Popes, in support of the pretensions of the Romish see. It is useful to attend to the process by which the forgery in these cases has been proved, for it strikingly illustrates, by the contrast, the impossibility of proving that the books which compose the New Testament were not written by the persons, and at the time usually supposed.

Not only has nothing that is possessed even of plausibility been adduced against the genuineness of the books that compose the New Testament, although it is scarcely possible that, if they had been the productions of a later age, this would not have been detected and exposed, but much positive evidence has been adduced from the language and style in which they are composed, and the minute and exact accordance between many of their statements, direct and incidental, and what we know from other sources of the true state of matters to which they advert in that age and country. This is an important department in the Christian evidence, and goes to establish not only the genuineness of the books that compose the New Testament, but also their authenticity, *i.e.* the general truth or credibility of the narratives they contain. The establishment of this position depends upon the adduction of specific historical evidence in its details; and

with these details you ought to make yourselves familiar. A summary of them is given in many works on the evidences; but the fullest and most complete collection of the materials bearing upon this subject is to be found in the first part of Lardner's *Credibility*, and in his collection of Jewish and heathen testimonies; while the argument derived from the language and style is well explained and illustrated in the second chapter of Michaelis' *Introduction to the New Testament*.

But the fullest and most direct proof of the genuineness of the books that compose the New Testament is the recognition of them, and the appeal to them in a succession of writers, from the apostolic age down to the present day; or, as perhaps it is better to put it, from the present day up to the apostolic age. This too is a very important department of the Christian evidences, and is dependent of course, like the former, upon the details of the historical proof that can be produced in support of it. The general principle upon which the conclusiveness of the proof of the genuineness of works supported and attested in this way rests, its perfect security, and its entire accordance with the principles on which we estimate the genuineness of all other literary productions which have been handed down from ancient times, are brought out in a very ingenious and satisfactory way in two valuable works of Mr Isaac Taylor, which are well worthy of being perused, entitled *The Transmission of Ancient Books*, and *The Process of Historic Proof*; and the details of the historical evidence upon which the application of these general principles to the establishment of the genuineness of the books composing the New Testament rests, are to be found most fully and minutely given in the second part of Lardner's *Credibility*, and in the supplement to it. A summary of the historical proof upon this point is given in Paley, and in many of the ordinary books upon the evidences.¹ There is also a very good book on this subject strongly recommended by Michaelis, along with Lardner—Less on *The Authenticity, uncorrupted Preservation, and Credibility of the New Testament*. This work was translated from the German, and published in this country above forty years ago, and the translation has again been republished lately. Lardner was

¹ Horne's *Introduction*, vol. i. p. 73, referring to Archbishop Marsh's *Lectures*, part ii., and Benson's *Hulsean Lectures* for 1820, pp. 78–84.

exceedingly cautious in conducting his argument, and very careful not to lay more stress upon any quotation or reference than it seemed fully qualified, upon the strictest examination, to bear. Less, however, is more scrupulous and fastidious in this respect even than Lardner, so that in his hands the evidence may be regarded as very thoroughly sifted indeed.

In what precise respect is caution required in this matter? The substance of the matter is this, that by a series of quotations from, and references to, the books that compose the New Testament, the facts recorded in them, and to their principal contents, contained in an unbroken succession of writers from the present day up to the apostolic age, we can prove by evidence the same in kind by which the genuineness of other ancient books is established, but immeasurably stronger in degree than that in which this evidence applies to any other writing of antiquity, that these books, substantially as we now have them, existed, and were generally known and received as the productions of the authors whose names they bear, in the age in which the events they describe took place. Here again I have to remind you that it is your duty, by the perusal of the works referred to, or other works in which this matter is illustrated, to make yourselves acquainted with and to fix in your minds the heads or substance of the historical evidence, consisting mainly of quotations and references by which this important proposition is established. The principles on which this mode of proving the genuineness of these books proceeds is in entire accordance with the dictates of common sense, and with the course adopted in regard to all the other literary productions of antiquity, and has been always recognised and acted upon. With the evidence we can adduce upon this point, the only alternative to the admission that the books of the New Testament were composed by the men whose names they bear, and at the time usually supposed, *i.e.* contemporaneously with the events they describe, is, that a series of writers, in different ages and countries, where concert was impossible, introduced into their works a great variety of statements, direct and incidental, for the concealed purpose of persuading posterity of the existence and general reception and notoriety of works which had then no existence—a notion of course too absurd to be seriously entertained. The evidence which thus establishes the genuineness of the books that compose the New

Testament goes far also to establish their authenticity or truth, as it proves that they were not only known to be in existence, but that they were generally *received as true* by very many who were deeply interested in the subject, and had carefully examined it from the time when they were given to the world, and this could scarcely have been the case, unless they had been in the main worthy of credit.

We thus prove the genuineness of the books that compose the New Testament, or shew that they were written, speaking generally and in the gross—for we are not at present considering, and we are in no way called upon at this stage of the argument to consider, the genuineness of each particular book—by the persons whose names they bear, and at the time usually believed; in other words, that they were composed by persons most closely connected with the events they describe, and given to the world, or subjected to the investigation of men in the age and country in which the events they describe were alleged to have taken place.

Upon this ground we are called upon to investigate these books as the most direct and certain means of learning the state of the whole matters connected with the claims which Christ and his apostles put forth, the grounds on which their claims were based, and the credit to which they are entitled. And here the first thing that naturally engages our attention is the general question of the apparent credibility of the men, and of their general narrative, leaving out of view, in the first instance, these peculiar and extraordinary circumstances on which the validity of their claims to a divine commission more immediately depended. And here again our attention is directed to two different points—first, to the internal marks of truth and honesty to be found in the New Testament, the general indications of integrity and veracity to be found in the representations which the authors of these books give of themselves, of the circumstances in which they were placed, and the manner in which they spoke and acted. This Dr Chalmers has fully discussed in the third chapter of his second book on “The External or Miraculous Evidences for the Truth of Christianity.” There comes in however, I think, also at this place with propriety and logical order, and in the natural following out of a legitimate train of thought, the topic which Dr Chalmers has discussed in the first chapter of his third book under the

general head of, "The Internal Evidence of Christianity," viz., "the consistency of Scripture with itself, and with cotemporary authorship." The consistency of the New Testament with cotemporary authorship has already been adverted to as a proof of its genuineness; but it affords also a proof of its authenticity or general truth or credibility, in accordance with principles which Dr Chalmers has fully illustrated. The consistency of the New Testament with itself, considering that it is composed of a variety of productions by different authors, and that this consistency is not merely the absence of inconsistency, but is exhibited in a great number of minute and obviously undesigned coincidences, as is most admirably illustrated in Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*, furnishes also, upon generally understood and admitted principles, a strong proof of the credibility of its authors, and the general truth of their statements. Now, these two points—viz., first, the internal marks of truth and honesty in the New Testament and its authors; and second, its consistency with itself and with cotemporary authorship—are important steps in the process of proof, and require to be pondered and examined, that you may be familiar with the facts and the considerations on which the argument derived from these sources rests. On these general grounds we would at once receive any ordinary history as authentic, credible, true, unless the veracity of the historians, or the truth of their narratives, could be distinctly and explicitly overturned by clear and unanswerable proof. It is upon proof the same in kind, though much inferior in degree, that we receive as authentic and true the best and most credible histories that have come down to us from ancient times—the histories, for example, of Thucydides and Cæsar.

The writers of the books of the New Testament were fully and personally conversant with the events which they describe, or had ready access to the best and most authentic information. They consist of several different persons, describing the same things, and their accounts in regard to all important matters—for that is all we need at present to maintain—are perfectly consistent with themselves and with each other. Their accounts were published to the world, and excited much attention, at a time and in circumstances when their narratives, if untrue, could have been easily detected and exposed. There is, and has been, no detection or exposure of their falsehoods, no contradiction of their general substance by cotemporary

or subsequent authors, but a great deal that decidedly confirms their truth and accuracy; and about the works, and the whole character, conduct, and deportment of the men and their associates as they appear in the works, there is everything that is generally recognised, upon the ground of the common principles of human nature, and the testimony of all history and experience, as indicating integrity and veracity in narrators, truth and accuracy in narratives. Upon these grounds, credit would at once be given to their narratives, just as we give credit to other ancient histories upon grounds similar in kind, though possessed of a much inferior degree of strength, were it not for the special and peculiar circumstance that they put forth claims to be received as divinely-commissioned teachers, and narrated miracles as having been wrought by them in attestation of their claims. Now, it may be conceded that this important peculiarity renders necessary the production of evidence in support of the truth of their statements stronger than would be required if they merely narrated to us the ordinary history of the period, like Josephus or Tacitus, although I think Dr Chalmers has successfully shewn that infidels have demanded, and that Christians have conceded, the propriety of demanding much more evidence than in right reason is necessary. No more evidence is necessary for establishing the *genuineness* of the books of the New Testament than for establishing that of any other ancient author, although we have much more to produce, because the genuineness of any ancient production is just an ordinary historical fact about which there is, and can be, nothing of a peculiar character. But for the authenticity of the books, or the actual truth of the narratives they contain, we do need evidence of a peculiar kind, because the authors of these books claimed to be divinely commissioned teachers, and professed to work miracles in support of their claims, and because these books were written for the very purpose of setting forth these claims, and the grounds on which they rest, and conveying to us the information which they professed to communicate in God's name. But this additional and peculiar evidence can, from the nature of the case, be found only in a most thorough knowledge of the men, of the circumstances in which their claims were advanced, of the proof they adduced in support of them, and of the evidence they gave of integrity and veracity, both generally and in this matter. The

only full and detailed information we have upon these subjects is derived from what is contained in the New Testament, and upon the grounds already explained, we are fully entitled to rely upon the general truth of the narratives there contained, *i.e.* the general representation there given of the claims they advanced, of the kind of proof they adduced, and of the leading circumstances of their position. Upon this ground, *i.e.* the general truth of the account they give of their situation and circumstances, we are enabled to come near them, to advance close up to them, as it were, to look at them carefully and close at hand, that we may thus judge of the integrity of their characters and the authenticity of their statements on those points on which the validity of their claims more immediately depends. Drawing near to them then in this way, and examining them more closely, we find first of all that the claims which Jesus Christ put forth on his own behalf during his life, and which his immediate followers put forth on his behalf after his death, were two-fold—first, more generally, that he was commissioned by God to make known his will to men; and second, more particularly, that he was the Christ, the Messiah, whose appearance on earth for important purposes connected with the glory of God and the salvation of men was understood to have been foretold in the books which compose the Old Testament. These two claims, though intimately connected with each other, are yet quite distinct, and may be expected to be made out distinctly, each by its own appropriate evidence. The claim to be regarded as the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament is perhaps the more important and fundamental of the two, because it is, in one point of view, the more comprehensive, and includes the other; for if Jesus can indeed be proved by appropriate evidence to have been the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament, then it follows at once that he was a divinely-commissioned teacher, authorised to speak in God's name, even though he might have wrought no miracles, and given no *other* evidence of a divine commission; whereas, even if, on the ground of miracles proved, he were admitted to be a divinely commissioned teacher, it would not at once follow as a matter of course that he was the predicted Messiah; while if he asserted that he was, and could not establish this position by its own pecu-

liar and appropriate evidence, this would throw serious doubt upon his claim to be received as a divinely commissioned teacher, and the proofs by which *that* claim might be supported, and thus leave the whole matter in a very unsatisfactory condition. It was the claim of Jesus to be received as the predicted Messiah that his immediate followers were chiefly in the habit of enforcing. But this was partly, perhaps chiefly, because they had principally to do with Jews, who acknowledged the divine authority of the Old Testament, and who were at this time in expectation of the Messiah, whom they believed to have been foretold. A previous belief indeed in the divine authority of the Old Testament is not necessary as a foundation for establishing the argument from prophecy. All that is necessary is to prove, as can be easily done, that the Old Testament prophecies existed before Jesus appeared on earth, and then that they were fulfilled in him; and when this is proved, then at once the Messiah and also the divine authority and inspiration of the prophecies of the Old Testament are established. These considerations tend to give the argument from prophecy in favour of the Messiahship of Jesus peculiar value and importance; and when combined with the fact that the investigation of this argument leads to a close and careful examination of a large portion of the sacred records, may be fairly regarded as entitling it to at least as large a share of your attention as the argument from miracles. But as unbelievers who are not Jews could scarcely be expected to attend with much interest at the beginning of the discussion to an examination of the age of the Old Testament records, or to a minute and careful investigation of their meaning, it has been common for the defenders of Christianity to direct attention in the first place to the claims of Jesus to be received generally as a divinely-commissioned teacher, and to the miracles alleged to have been wrought in support of this claim.



LECTURE XIII.

MIRACLES—HUME'S ARGUMENT.

WE now then return to this point, that Jesus and his immediate followers professed to be divinely-commissioned teachers, and to have wrought miracles in confirmation of this claim; and we have in the books of the New Testament an account of the whole circumstances in which these claims were put forth, of the miracles alleged to have been wrought in support of them, and of the effects of all this upon the minds of men. No proof of the integrity and veracity of Christ and his apostles, however satisfactory and conclusive, would be sufficient to establish their claims, had they merely asserted that they were commissioned by God, without producing proofs of this satisfactory to the minds of men. They might have asserted that they were authorised by God to make known his will to men. There might be about their whole character, conduct, and deportment, every evidence of honesty and integrity. They might have been tested by the severest sufferings and persecutions, inflicted just because of their asserting this, and might have expired in agonies, cheerfully endured upon this ground, and from which a mere renunciation of this claim would have saved them. But this would not have been sufficient. Those who witnessed all this, and we who might be convinced upon satisfactory evidence that it took place, would be constrained indeed to admit the honesty and veracity of these men, *i.e.* to admit that they really believed that they were commissioned by God; but for anything that appears in the case as thus stated, we might be warranted in believing that they were mistaken in this belief, or at least that nothing had been proved which laid any obligation upon us to believe it. Their cotemporaries would justly require something more than their own

honest and assured conviction that God had authorised them, some palpable proof of this, some tangible attestation to it, on God's part. And so do we. And accordingly we find that they professed to work miracles, plain matters of fact, cognisable by the senses, and not mere convictions or impressions, and appealed to them in proof that they were sent by God, and authorised to speak in his name. So that the question comes to this, Did they really work miracles, as they alleged? Was this proved? And have we still satisfactory evidence of it? Now, they record many miracles which they professed to have wrought. They describe to us the circumstances in which they were performed, and they make it plain that their whole testimony virtually bore, not merely upon the sincerity of their own conviction that God had commissioned and instructed them, but upon the reality and truth of those outward and sensible miraculous events which they tell us they produced, or which are recorded to have been produced in connection with them.

But here we are met at the outset with a preliminary difficulty, which must be removed out of the way before we can advance any further. It is the allegation on the part of infidels, accompanied with an offer and an appearance of proof, that miracles cannot be proved; that they are incredible; that, from the nature and general character of a miracle, there is always, and in every case, an amount of proof or evidence against its truth or reality which cannot be overcome by any strength of human testimony. This was the substance of the celebrated infidel argument of Hume; and it is at this point, I think, that in following out the natural train of thought in expounding the evidences of Christianity, the consideration of the argument of Hume properly comes in, although Dr Chalmers, for reasons which he assigns in his preface, and which are not destitute of weight, has, after some hesitation as he states, made it the subject of the first book of his *Evidences*. Here therefore we must stop and consider this argument, and ascertain distinctly whether or not it really throws an impassable barrier in the way of our further progress. Now, the first thing to be done is, to form a clear and distinct conception of what the argument is, and what are the grounds on which it rests. And in a matter of so much importance as this professes to be, it is but fair and reasonable that a knowledge of the argument

should be derived from the author of the argument himself—*i.e.* should be acquired from a perusal, if you have the opportunity, of Hume's *Essay on Miracles*. This however is not indispensable, for the argument is sufficiently distinct and intelligible; its meaning and its grounds can be very easily apprehended, and there can be no doubt of the accuracy of the abstract of this argument, which Dr Chalmers quotes from Dr Campbell, at p. 70 of his first volume on the *Evidences*.

Having made yourselves familiar with the import of Hume's argument, and the grounds on which it rests, you have next to consider whether or not it can be answered, and if so, in what way. Now, as I am at present merely giving you an outline, or rather a skeleton, of the general train of thought by which the truth of Christianity may be established, with the view of illustrating the connection of the different parts of the proof, and pointing out where additional information may be obtained, I do not mean to examine the argument, but shall reserve anything I may think it needful to say about it till we come to the consideration of Dr Chalmers's exposure of it. At present then I would only observe that Dr Chalmers deals with Hume's argument by a different process of reasoning from what former writers on the subject had employed, conceding to Hume one of his fundamental principles, that our belief in testimony, our reliance upon the truth and certainty of information derived from the declarations of men, is based upon experience; and although I am persuaded that Dr Chalmers's answer to Hume is the best and most conclusive that has been given, the most accordant with the dictates both of sound philosophy and common sense, yet you are not to imagine that previous works upon this subject in answer to Hume's argument have lost all their value, so as to be unworthy of your attention or perusal. Some of them are still well deserving of being perused and examined, both because it is interesting and useful to see an argument which has been so much boasted of by the enemies of Christianity, and which, if valid, is so sweeping and decisive in its character, examined in different aspects, and subjected to different tests by men of ability, and also because Hume's *Essay on Miracles* contains some important things connected with the subject of miracles, besides the direct argument by which he professed to shew that they are universally incredible, or that they can never

be proved; and to an exposure of this fundamental point Dr Chalmers has wholly confined himself. Dr Campbell's *Dissertation upon Miracles* is a singularly ingenious and effective work, and well worthy of a perusal. There is also much good and useful matter in Adam's *Essay on Miracles*, the first book, I believe, written in answer to Hume; in the 19th, 20th, and 21st letters of Leland's *View of the Deistical Writers*; in Douglas's *Criterion of Miracles*; and in Price's *Dissertation* upon the subject. By the perusal of some of these works, and especially by the careful study of the first book of Dr Chalmers's *Evidences*, you will, I have no doubt, be firmly persuaded not only that Hume's leading direct argument is utterly fallacious and sophistical, although that is the main point, but also, moreover, that in conducting his argument, he has been frequently obliged to have recourse to mere quibbling and shuffling in the use of language, and to much disingenuous misrepresentation; and that, after all, he has not been able to adhere steadfastly to his position, but has been constrained by the force of common sense, virtually, perhaps inadvertently, to abandon it. It is assumed now then that Hume's argument has been answered, *i.e.* that it has been proved that he has brought forward no sufficient evidence to convince us that miracles are incredible, and cannot be proved by testimony; and that it has, moreover, been proved—for this is necessary in order to a thorough and entire removal of the barrier which his arguments would interpose to our progress—that there may be such testimony—testimony so circumstanced and so guaranteed—as that there has never been anything like an experience of its deceiving men, and that we would be constrained, by a regard to right reason and common sense, to believe it, even when it is adduced in support of events plainly and undeniably miraculous.

Having removed this barrier out of the way, and having at the same time been led in the course of the process to form some pretty clear and definite notion of what a miracle *is*, and of what is the kind and degree of evidence necessary to establish its truth, or rather, having been led to form a notion of a sort of testimony that would constrain a reasonable man to believe any fact or work, however miraculous, in support of which it might be adduced, we now return to consider the actual evidence we possess in support of the truth of the miracles alleged to have been performed by

Christ and his apostles, with the view of ascertaining whether that evidence be sufficient to establish them. Now, this evidence is in substance just the solemn, deliberate, consistent attestation of a considerable number of men, whose general character is unimpeachable, who exhibit every mark of honesty and integrity, who persevered in this attestation when called upon to renounce every worldly comfort, and subjected to the severest sufferings on account of their adherence to it, and who at last laid down their lives in confirmation of the truth of their attestation. This is the general ground on which we believe in the truth of the miracles alleged to have been performed by Christ and his apostles. And you will observe that the essential element in the proof is the evidence that they forfeited all, and suffered all, even death itself, just because of the attestation they gave to these miraculous events, and did this voluntarily, *i.e.* while they might have escaped loss, suffering, and death by abandoning or retracting their attestation. And hence it is that Paley sets forth as his main and fundamental proposition in his *Evidences* the great doctrine "that there is satisfactory evidence, that many professing to be the original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct." And hence too it is that, in establishing this fundamental proposition, he labours mainly to prove—first, that they endured the severest sufferings in attestation of their belief in the accounts they gave; and second, that the story for which they suffered was in the main the same which we now have. Of the proof of the precise position that they voluntarily endured severe and protracted suffering in attestation of the truth of their story, it is not possible to give a more clear, exact, or more beautiful and satisfactory exposition, than is contained in the first five chapters of Paley, and *these* therefore it is your imperative duty to peruse and examine.

In regard to his other leading positions under this great general head, *viz.*—first, that the story for which they suffered was miraculous, and that it was in the main the story which we now have, which last position he proves (first) from indirect considerations, and then (second) from the authority of our historical Scriptures,

it may be observed that they are obviously involved in the establishment of the genuineness and general credibility of the books that compose the New Testament, in the sense, to the extent, and upon the grounds which were explained in last lecture, and the investigation of which, I think, properly and naturally precedes the consideration of the apostles' sufferings for their testimony, which sufferings constitute the foundation of that *special* evidence for the truth of their accounts, required by their special position as asserting that they wrought miracles. I think it at once a more natural and a more logical order to follow in expounding the Christian evidences to begin with establishing the genuineness and general credibility of the writers of the New Testament, so as to put them in the first place at least upon a level with the most authentic of ancient historians, and thus lay a basis upon the ground of which we could have implicitly believed them had they merely related the ordinary history of the period, like Josephus and Tacitus (and of the evidence by which this can be done satisfactorily, I gave an outline in last lecture); and then, assuming this to be true until it be conclusively proved that they were either deceivers or deceived, to make use of the general information thus obtained for taking a nearer and closer view of them, that we may see whether their testimony was of such a kind, in itself and in its accompaniments, as to warrant us in believing on the strength of it that they wrought miracles in attestation of their claim to be received as divinely commissioned teachers. And when we have come to this position, it is evident that the main points to be proved are—first, that they stood in such a relation to the miraculous events they describe that they could not be deceived themselves; and second, that by the sufferings they endured they gave such proofs of their integrity and veracity in this matter that we may be sure they were not imposters trying to deceive others. Both these points must be proved; but, when proved, they are sufficient and satisfactory. This is the subject of Dr Chalmers's fourth chapter of book ii., which he describes in general (p. 175) as an exhibition of the "known situation and history of the authors, as satisfying proofs of the veracity with which they delivered themselves." In illustration at once of the necessity and sufficiency of all this, we may refer to the miracles alleged to have been performed by Vespasian, as recorded in Tacitus. This case has

attracted a good deal of notice, especially since it was brought forward by Hume in his *Essay on Miracles*, as entitled to be put in competition, in respect to evidence, with the miracles of the New Testament. The utter folly and dishonesty of making or insinuating any such comparison has been fully exposed by Campbell and Paley;¹ but I refer to it at present simply for the purpose of pointing out two or three points of contrast, not so much in the actual proof, as in the relation in which the miracles of Vespasian and those of Christ and his apostles stand respectively to the *kind* of proof necessary in such cases. Tacitus is a generally credible historian, and therefore we believe upon his authority that the general scene which he describes took place with Vespasian and a lame and a blind man in Alexandria; that some people believed that on that occasion these persons were miraculously cured by the emperor, and that, as he says, some “who were present (continue to) relate these cures even at this time (about thirty years after) when there is nothing to be gained by lying.” We believe this upon the ground of the general credibility of Tacitus as a historian, just as we believe, upon the ground of the general credibility of the evangelists, the general account they give of their position and circumstances. So far they are upon a level; but now mark the contrast in all other respects:—

1. Tacitus, who records these things, and from whose statement alone we know anything about them, does not give his own personal attestation to the truth and reality of the alleged miracles. He does not tell us that *he* believed them, and his narrative would rather lead us to conjecture that he did not; whereas we have the full and cordial conviction of the writers of the New Testament—men with every appearance of honesty and integrity about them—that the miracles they record really took place.

2. We have no account of these alleged miracles of Vespasian from any persons who were closely connected with the events themselves, who had full opportunity of knowing all about them and investigating them, who were under some call either of duty or of interest to make themselves thoroughly acquainted with the real state of the case, and whose detailed narrative of the circum-

¹ Paley is particularly good, clear, brief, and comprehensive (chap. ii. under prop. ii. pp. 204, 205).

stances, whatever might have been their object in preparing it, might have afforded materials for either confirming or overturning the direct declarations which they might make, and the convictions they might express, respecting it; whereas, in the case of the New Testament miracles, we find that the accounts of them come from men who stood in such a relation to them that they could not but be constrained to investigate them thoroughly, and that they could not be deceived in the result of their investigation, while the detailed narratives which they have given us of them contain nothing to invalidate, but much to confirm the truth of their accounts. We are entitled to hear the declaration of the parties, the statement of the original witnesses.

3. For anything that appears, and supposing all to be true which has been really recorded concerning Vespasian's miracles, it is quite possible, nay, highly probable, that the whole affair was a mere trick or deception got up by the officials of the temple, and that Vespasian himself might or might not be a party to it. There is not only nothing in the circumstances to preclude this supposition, but much to favour it; and if it were so, there was certainly no power or party in Alexandria that had either the inclination or the ability to detect and proclaim the imposture; whereas the miracles of Christ and his apostles were performed in circumstances which are plainly inconsistent with the supposition of collusion or deception, and in which there were parties who were both able and willing at once to have detected and exposed imposture.

4. We have no adequate evidence of the sincerity of those who related these miracles. We believe, on Tacitus' authority, that some persons who were present believed that the lame and the blind men were miraculously cured by Vespasian, and that they continued to express this opinion even after, in consequence of the termination of the Flavian dynasty, no gain was to be made by lying. Who or what these persons were, what was their general character, or what were their circumstances, what were their means and opportunities of investigating the matter, and ascertaining thoroughly how it stood—of all this we know nothing; and for anything that appears, Tacitus himself might have no personal or explicit knowledge of them, and yet it is really on *their* testimony that the case rests. It is very evident that some

gain might be expected from asserting the reality of these miracles during the reigns of Vespasian and his two sons, Titus and Domitian; and it was not wonderful that men should continue to repeat the opinion they had formerly expressed, even when no further gain could be expected, since at the same time no danger or loss was incurred by their testimony. How different this from the case of the original narrators of the miracles of the New Testament, who, while they were so situated that they could not be deceived in the matter, gave the most conclusive evidence of their sincerity by lives of toil and hardship, and deaths of shame and agony, voluntarily endured, just because of the testimony they bore! If, after the Flavian dynasty had terminated, Trajan had thought proper, for reasons of state, to deal with those men who professed to believe in the reality of Vespasian's miracles, *as we know from undoubted authority that he dealt with the Christians, i.e. to give them the alternative of either retracting their testimony, or submitting to death; and if in these circumstances, and upon this ground, they had suffered death, then this would have made their case parallel to that of the apostles, so far as the proof of sincerity is concerned.* Had events of this kind taken place, and been transmitted to us in credible histories, then we would have admitted that the men who were subjected to such a test and stood it believed in the reality of Vespasian's miracles, although of course it would still remain a distinct question, to be decided upon a fair view of all the circumstances, whether it was not possible, or even probable, that they might have been mistaken, and that notwithstanding the sincerity of their conviction, no real miracles had been performed upon that occasion.

Many of the miracles performed by our Saviour and his apostles were such that many men had the fullest opportunity of testing their reality, so that there was no room for deception or doubt, while the sufferings they endured because of their testimony afforded satisfactory proof of their sincerity.

Some writers upon the evidence of Christianity, for the purpose of bringing out more distinctly that the apostles suffered and died not merely in attestation of their general conviction that they were divinely commissioned, but also of the specific miraculous facts upon which their conviction was based, have selected the

resurrection of Christ, and have illustrated the way and manner in which the general evidence for the truth of Christianity bears upon the proof of that great event. Jesus may be said, in a sense, to have staked the truth of his claims upon the fulfilment of his own prediction that he was to be put to death, and to rise again from the dead ; and his immediate followers made the fact that he had risen again from the dead the main subject of their testimony, and adduced it as the great ground and reason of the whole course which they adopted in devoting themselves to the preaching of the gospel, to the propagation of Christianity, and of all the hardships they endured in this cause. The apostle Paul, after stating the full and conclusive evidence they had to adduce that Christ had risen again, illustrates its importance by saying, "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. xv. 14). And it is well known that the primitive Christians were accustomed to use, as a brotherly salutation on meeting, the word ἀνεστήσε, "He is risen again," indicating that the resurrection of Christ was the basis of their hopes, the subject of their daily and habitual contemplation, and the source of their motives ; that they had risen with Christ to newness of life, and were striving themselves, and encouraging each other, to set their affections on things above. Now, of this event, so fundamentally important, the defenders of Christianity undertake to prove the following propositions, and have established them by evidence which has been often cavilled at, but cannot be successfully assailed :—1st, That the apostles who have attested it could not be deceived in the matter, *i.e.* that if it were not true that their Master had been raised from the dead, they must have been fully aware of this, or at least fully aware that there was no ground for asserting it. 2d. That they did not act the part of deceivers or imposters, declaring what they knew to be false, when they testified that he had risen again, and had been seen of them ; and on the proof of this position of course there bears all the evidence we have of their general integrity and veracity, and especially that derived from their forfeiting every temporal and worldly advantage, and enduring every hardship, even death itself, just because of their testimony to its reality, and because of the course of conduct which a conviction of its reality led them to adopt. 3d. That if Christ did not indeed rise from the dead,

then, whether they deceived themselves, or laboured to deceive others in asserting that he did, they could not have succeeded in convincing so many that Christ had risen. If the story had not been true, its falsehood could easily, from the nature of the case, have been detected and exposed. The whole power and influence of the world was on the side of their enemies, who, from the success with which the labours of the apostles were soon followed, could not possibly have overlooked or despised them. They had no advantage for persuading men of the truth of this event, in any of the prejudices or prepossessions of those to whom they addressed themselves; they did and they could hold out to them no temporal or worldly inducements to lead them to believe this; they held out nothing but the prospect of happiness in a future and unseen world, the hope of which was based only upon the truth of Christ's resurrection, of which therefore men would take good care to satisfy themselves; and yet we find that, before the personal labours of the immediate witnesses of Christ's resurrection were brought to a close, there were many thousands scattered over a considerable portion of the earth who were firmly persuaded of its truth, who were just as willing to suffer death in attesting it as the apostles themselves were, and many of whom were honoured with the crown of martyrdom. This result could not have taken place if Christ's resurrection had not been true, and thoroughly established by satisfactory evidence. 4th. That the resurrection of Christ, if true, was a real miracle, which could not have been effected through the ordinary operation of the laws of nature, or by the exertion of any human power; and when viewed in connection with the circumstances in which it took place, and the use which was made of it, could be regarded in no other light than as an attestation by at least a superior invisible power to the truth of the claim which Jesus and his apostles put forth to be received as the messengers of God [Ditton, West, Sherlock]. The same general process of argument might be applied to other leading miracles recorded in the New Testament. It has been applied very skilfully and successfully to the conversion of the apostle Paul by Lord Lyttleton, in his very valuable *Observations* on that important event. If it be proved satisfactorily that Christ rose from the dead, or that he appeared to Paul on his way to Damascus, and called him to the

apostleship, then there can of course be no difficulty whatever about any of the miracles, or indeed any other matter of fact whatever, recorded in the New Testament, so far as concerns the evidence on which they rest. They rest upon the same evidence, and must therefore be equally admitted; while it should be remembered that the number and variety of the miracles wrought, their character, and the circumstances in which they were performed, preclude the idea of anything like either collusion or mistake.



LECTURE XIV.

EVIDENCE OF MIRACLES STILL SATISFACTORY, JUST AS IF
WE HAD WITNESSED THEM—CONNECTION BETWEEN
MIRACLES AND DOCTRINE—PROPHECY—CONCLUSION OF
EXTERNAL EVIDENCES.

WHEN we are once convinced, upon satisfactory evidence, that the miracles recorded in the New Testament really took place, that Christ wrought many miracles during his public ministry, that he was raised from the dead and appeared alive to his disciples, and that his immediate followers, while bearing testimony to his resurrection, wrought miracles in his name, then we are placed in substantially the same situation as if we had seen these miracles ourselves, and were satisfied of their truth and reality by the evidence of our own senses. It is a sound and reasonable principle that any matter of fact, of the reality of which we would be satisfied upon the evidence of our senses, may be established by testimony—and by the way this principle, if true, overturns the whole of Hume's argument, unless infidels were prepared to assert that we could not rationally believe miracles, even upon the evidence of the senses—and what we assert in regard to the miracles alleged to have been wrought by Christ and his apostles is, that they are supported by testimony of such a kind that in right reason we are just as fully warranted and as imperatively called upon to believe in their truth and reality as if they had been subjected to our own senses. Infidels, besides asserting that miracles cannot be proved by any testimony, are in the habit of maintaining that the strength of testimony progressively diminishes in proportion to the interval between the events attested and any subsequent period at which the testimony may be

examined. And this is the proper place, in the progress of the argument, for examining this allegation, though indeed it scarcely needs or deserves examination. It is a mere vague generality, which is plausible in sound, but cannot stand investigation. Its futility, as applicable to the matter before us, is established by proving conclusively the genuineness of the books of the New Testament, and shewing that they have come down to us uncorrupted and unmutilated—in other words, by proving that we have just as good, and indeed precisely the same, means of knowing what testimony the apostles gave, in what circumstances they gave it, and by what evidence they supported it, as have been enjoyed in any previous century up till the time when men could no longer have personal intercourse with the apostles, or with those who witnessed the miracles.¹

We assume then that we have now, just as the Church has had in every intervening age, satisfactory evidence of the truth and reality of the miracles alleged to have been wrought by Christ and his apostles; and we draw from this the inference that we should regard ourselves as placed in the same situation as if we had witnessed them. This being supposed and realised, the question then occurs, What conclusions do we draw from these miracles, with reference to the claims which those who performed them put forth to be received as divinely-commissioned teachers? Do these miracles really afford satisfactory evidence that God sent them into the world, and authorised them to make known his will to men, so that we are bound at once to receive what they declared as resting upon God's authority? This leads to the consideration of a very important subject, and one not altogether free from difficulty, although the difficulty lies much more in the abstract principles that may be brought into discussion in connection with it than in the more direct and practical point of actually deducing from the truth of the miracles of Christ and his apostles a satisfactory argument for the truth of Christianity. This subject is "the connection between the truth of a miracle and the truth of the doctrine in support of which it is performed."

It seems very plainly taught in Scripture that both Christ and his apostles appealed to their miracles in support of their divine

¹ Dr Gregory's Letters, quoted in Horne, who also refers to Benson's *Hulsean Lectures* for 1820, pp. 70-98 (Horne, i. p. 233).

commission, and the consequent truth of the doctrines they taught. But this has not been admitted even by all who profess to acknowledge the authority of the Scriptures. It was maintained by Collins, the well-known infidel, that Christ and his followers appealed only to prophecy in support of their claims, and after trying to establish this, he made it his principal business to shew that prophecy afforded no rational and certain evidence of the truth of Christ's Messiahship. The infidel rationalists or anti-supernaturalists of Germany—who being, many of them, ministers and professors of theology, profess to believe in a certain sense in revelation, Christianity, and the Bible, while in truth they should ever be regarded and treated as infidels—as they generally deny that Christ and his apostles ever performed any miracles, deny that they ever appealed to anything of this sort in support of their claims, and they endeavour to establish this by perverting the plain statements of Scripture. Accordingly, in the more orthodox works published in Germany, you frequently find a formal proof of the position that Christ and his apostles appealed to their miracles in support of their claims, and an exposure of the attempts of the infidel rationalists to pervert the meaning of these passages of Scripture in which this position is so clearly established.¹ I would have liked to have devoted an hour to reading and examining these passages, but time forbids it. We may possibly return to it. The only question that now remains is this, Was this appeal which they made to miracles in support of their claims well founded? Did these miracles really afford a proof that they were commissioned by God, and that their doctrine was true? A miracle witnessed or proved necessarily implies, and of course proves, the existence and present operation of some superior invisible intelligence, and does not seem directly and of itself necessarily to prove more. A question has been agitated upon this subject, viz., whether it can be proved from reason and Scripture that God alone can work miracles, or whether it is not possible that what appear as miracles to us may be effected by inferior beings? I have said from reason or Scripture, because many authors, when they come to this question, refer to the light thrown upon it by Scripture,² although this is

¹ Storr and Flatt's *Biblical Theology*, p. 19; Knapp's *Lectures*.

² Egyptian Magicians and Demoniack Possessions.

scarcely suitable to the present stage of the argument, when we are still engaged in establishing the claims of Christianity against infidels.

There is nothing in the informations of reason or the doctrines of natural theology to prove that there are not beings inferior to God who may be able to perform miracles; but neither, on the other hand, does natural theology give any positive information about the existence and powers of such beings; while it plainly enough teaches that miracles cannot, any more than ordinary events, take place without the appointment or permission of Him who alone governs the world, and who has all beings and all influences under his control; that he will neither produce nor permit such events as are fitted to lead his rational creatures into error concerning himself and his will, and that he will assuredly give to all who sincerely desire to know the truth, and use their faculties aright, sufficient means of preserving themselves from error, even though other beings inferior to him, but superior to men, should be permitted to attempt to deceive them, or to lead them to believe that God had made a revelation of his will when he had not. I must remember, however, that I am not to discuss this subject at present, but merely to indicate its general nature, and the place it occupies in the general train of reasoning by which the truth of Christianity may be established, reserving any additional observations concerning it till we come to consider the last chapter of the second book of Dr Chalmers's *Evidences*, where this subject is discussed. I believe, as he does, though it is a point on which the writers on Christian evidences are not by any means unanimous, that some reference to the general character of the doctrines taught, and of the scheme or objects contemplated by those who work miracles, is necessary, in order to our having a well-grounded assurance that they were commissioned by God, and authorised to speak in his name. But then it can be easily proved that whatever of this sort may be necessary upon any theory, fully and clearly attaches to the miracles performed by Christ and his followers, and thus it can be conclusively established that those who saw their miracles and heard their instructions—and of course we who, as has been shewn, are, by the proofs we have of the truth of the miracles, and the knowledge we possess of their doctrine, placed in substantially the same situation as if we had

seen and heard them—have abundant ground to believe assuredly that God sent them into the world to make known his will, and that therefore we are bound to receive whatever it can be shewn they declared or enjoined, as resting upon the authority of God himself.

The reference to the general character of the doctrine and of the system in connection with which miracles are wrought, which may be necessary in order to give validity to the argument from miracles in proof of an immediate and supernatural revelation from God, naturally paves the way for the consideration of the internal evidence, or the evidence derived from the character and substance of the revelation itself; in other words, the investigation of the question, whether or not there be, in the general character and in the specific features of the system of doctrine and morality taught by Christ and his apostles, anything which of itself proves that they did reveal God's will, and were specially authorised by him to do so. But there is another point to which we must again advert before proceeding to give a brief outline of this subject. We formerly explained the double claim which Christ and his followers put forth on his behalf—first, that he was a teacher sent from God; and second, that he was the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament prophecies; or, as it has been sometimes expressed—first, that he was a prophet; second, that he was *the* prophet; and we have made some observations on the relation in which these two claims stand to each other. They are distinct claims, and they are co-ordinate with each other; *i.e.* each stands upon its own proper footing, and must be substantiated by its own peculiar and appropriate evidence. The appropriate evidence of a claim to be received as a divinely commissioned teacher is miracles—results cognisable by the senses, which could not be effected by human power, and which could not take place without the immediate agency, or at least the explicit permission, of Him who rules the world.

In the nature of the proposition that Jesus was the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures, there is necessarily involved the idea that the proper proof of it must be derived from a comparison of Old Testament statements with his life and history, from shewing that predictions are contained in the Old Testament which were fulfilled in him. A prediction of a future

event is a miracle, and whenever an event occurs which can be proved to have been predicted, while yet it can be shewn that it could not have been foreseen by any mere human sagacity, then we are warranted to say that in this matter a miracle has been wrought, and we are entitled to bring to bear upon it all these general principles, and to draw from it all those inferences, which miracles, in the more ordinary and familiar sense of the word, sanction. If then it can be proved that Christ was plainly foretold in the Old Testament, then this, as a miracle or series of miracles wrought in manifest and intended connection with him, proves him to have been a divinely commissioned teacher; while, as the fulfilment in him of prophecies concerning one who was to come in God's name to make known his will and to accomplish his purposes, it proves him to be the Christ, or the predicted Messiah. Whereas, on the other hand, the proof by miracles that he was a divinely commissioned teacher, does not of itself, and *ipso facto*, prove him to have been the Christ. It may indeed be said that if he is proved to be a divinely commissioned teacher, we must believe on his authority whatever he asserts concerning himself, and thus, since he asserted it, that he was the Messiah. This is true abstractly; but still, since the proposition that he was the Messiah admits, from its nature, of being proved by its own direct and appropriate evidence, the matter would stand in a somewhat awkward predicament if we could not prove it by a comparison of the Old Testament statements with his history, and could establish it *only* in the indirect and round-about way of first proving that he was a divinely commissioned teacher, and that all his statements are to be received as true; and second, that he asserted that he was the Messiah, and that therefore *this* was true.

I cannot see that there is any proper sense in which prophecy can be rightly represented, as Dr Paley has done, as one of the *auxiliary* evidences of Christianity. It does not go to confirm or build up the evidence of miracles. The proof from miracles would be just as strong as it is, if there was no evidence from prophecy, and no claim to Messiahship. Prophecy is either a direct and fundamental evidence, going explicitly, and of itself, to prove that Jesus was the Christ, or it is no evidence at all. If there be such vagueness or obscurity in the prophecies of the Old Testament as

to render their application to Christ doubtful without a previous proof that Jesus and his apostles did not, and could not, err in interpreting them, then prophecy, properly speaking, does not of itself afford a proof, but only a presumption, in favour of his claims. Whereas if, from a fair and impartial investigation of the meaning of the Old Testament statements, it can be proved that they contain many predictions which were fulfilled in Christ, then here is a direct, fundamental, independent proof, of the truth of his claims, not auxiliary to the argument from miracles, or to any other argument for the truth of Christianity, but complete in itself, and resting upon its own proper and independent basis.

We have not here to do with the general subject of prophecy, or with the general principles applicable to the interpretation of it, but merely with the question, whether there be such predictions in the Old Testament as, being fulfilled in Jesus and his history, prove him to be a divinely commissioned messenger of God. There are many predictions contained in the Old Testament which can be proved to have been fulfilled, and to be now fulfilling, but which had not their fulfilment in the life and history of Christ. They were fulfilled, and are fulfilling, in the history of the Jews and other nations, of Nineveh, Babylon, Tyre, &c. These predictions fulfilled, prove that the men who uttered them were instructed and inspired by God, and thus go to establish the divine authority and inspiration of the Old Testament; and this applies to all predictions fulfilled. But they do not directly establish the Messiahship of Jesus. To establish this, we must shew that there are in the Old Testament predictions of some one who was afterwards to appear on earth to reveal God's will and to accomplish his purposes, and that these predictions were fulfilled in our Saviour. This argument may be addressed either to Jews or to men who admit the divine authority neither of the Old nor of the New Testament; and the conditions of the argument vary somewhat, according as it is addressed to the one or the other of these two classes. The Jews admit (1) that the writings of the Old Testament existed long before our Saviour appeared on earth; (2) that they proceeded from God, and therefore have all a meaning and an object; and (3) that they distinctly point to one who was to come—to a great and exalted being, who was to be employed by God in accomplishing his purposes. Infidels do not

admit these positions; and therefore, in dealing with them, they must be proved. We prove that the writings of the Old Testament existed long before the appearance of our Saviour, by the same kind of evidence by which we establish the genuineness of the books of the New Testament; evidence external and internal, the language and contents, concurrence with general history, versions, quotations, and references, and especially by the testimony of the Jews themselves. Infidels are not bound by their principles, as Jews are, to admit that there is a real meaning in all the prophecies of the Old Testament. In discussing the meaning of passages in the Old Testament with a Jew, in order to shew that they contain predictions which were fulfilled in Jesus, we argue upon the assumption, which he admits, that they were inspired by God, that they have a meaning, and were intended to predict something. And these admissions are sometimes of importance in investigating some of the more obscure prophecies. For when we have endeavoured to establish the true meaning of a prediction in the Old Testament, we are entitled to insist that the Jew, who may object to our interpretation, shall give an interpretation of his own, and then the question is virtually reduced to this, whether the one or the other of these interpretations is the right one; whereas all that can be logically expected from an infidel is merely to prove that our interpretation is not correct, or is not fully established. He is not bound to admit that the passage has any meaning, except in so far as we can succeed in establishing that *this* is the meaning; and would probably not scruple to say, as indeed infidels have often said, that the prophecies of the Old Testament are so obscure as to be unintelligible, and that it is impossible to bring any clear and definite meaning out of them. I mention this because it is right that you should distinctly understand the conditions and difficulties of the argument, when you undertake to prove that there exist in the Old Testament predictions which were fulfilled in our Saviour, and thus prove him to be the Messiah, and because in the great controversy which took place in England in the early part of last century on the subject of the nature, certainty, and grounds of the argument from prophecy occasioned by the publication of Collins' infidel work on *The Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, some of the less careful and discriminating of his opponents over-

looked this distinction, and thus gave him an excuse for triumphing over them, of which he was not slow to take advantage. It is but an extension of the same idea to notice that in arguing from prophecy with a Jew, we have the advantage of his conceding to us that the subject of many predictions in the Old Testament is one great being who was to come, and when he came, to contribute greatly to the accomplishment of God's purposes;—an admission which affords a key to the meaning of many of them, and narrows and facilitates greatly the discussion concerning their application to Jesus, and their fulfilment in him; whereas, in arguing from prophecy with an infidel, this must be proved from an examination of the prophecies themselves before we are entitled to assume it.

The common allegations of infidels in regard to the argument from prophecy in support of the Messiahship of Jesus, and the consequent truth of his religion, are:—1st. That the prophecies are so obscure, confused, and perplexed, that it is not possible to extract from them any clear, definite, and intelligible meaning. 2d. That if there be some of them which contain statements similar to what is found in the life and history of Jesus, yet the resemblance may be accounted for in other ways—by chance or accident, or by design on the part of Jesus and his followers, and at any rate is much too vague and indefinite to require us to have recourse to the supposition of a supernatural inspired prediction. Now, you must observe that these allegations are brought forward in reply to the adduction of passages from the Old Testament by the defenders of Christianity, in which they profess to have found clear predictions of events and circumstances which were fulfilled in the life and history of Jesus; and these allegations of infidels are to be answered, not by abstract reasonings—although it is right to explain, as can be easily done, the reasons why it was right, and might have been expected, that some *degree* of obscurity would attach to prophecies—but just by a re-adduction and re-examination of the passages, by a solution of the doubts which infidels may have tried to raise about the meaning of particular predictions, the obscurity they may have attempted to throw over them; and thus, by a careful examination of the prophecies themselves, by an exact investigation of their meaning, and a careful comparison of them with their alleged fulfilment in the life and history of Jesus, and in many things about him, which

could not have been brought about by the contrivance of himself and his followers, establishing the conclusion that there is in the Old Testament a series of statements, exhibiting indeed different degrees of clearness and explicitness, but yet sufficiently clear and explicit to prove, when viewed in connection with the life and history of Jesus, that the leading events in that life and history were foretold, and that he therefore was the subject of special divine communications, that he possesses all the character and qualities which in the Old Testament are ascribed to him who was to come, and may consequently be implicitly trusted as an authorised revealer of God's will.

Everything, therefore, depends in this matter upon ascertaining the true meaning of particular predictions, and shewing that there is such a definite correspondence between their meaning and import as they stand in the Old Testament, and events in the life and history of Christ, as to preclude the idea of any other explanation than that there was a supernatural prediction, and it was fulfilled in Jesus. And hence, as we formerly remarked, arises one important advantage of studying fully the argument from prophecy, that it leads to a careful and exact investigation of the meaning of a considerable portion of the inspired word of God, and that thus, by one and the same process, we obtain abundant materials for establishing the divine authority of the sacred Scriptures, and also acquire much knowledge of their contents, or of the revelation which they make to us of the divine will.

It would tend to involve in serious doubt the whole argument from prophecy for the Messiahship of Jesus, unless we could point out in the Old Testament single and distinct predictions which, in their literal and exact meaning, critically ascertained, did apply to Jesus, and were fulfilled in him; and it is most satisfactory that there are not a few predictions contained in the Old Testament which, when taken singly, each by itself, can be proved, after the most careful examination of their meaning, to have been real predictions which were fulfilled in our Saviour. But still the strength and impression of the argument from prophecy depend very materially upon the proof that can be adduced from the Old Testament of a series of predictions, commencing very near the origin of our race, and extending over several thousand

years, all consistent with each other, but increasing gradually in clearness and explicitness, plainly pointing, individually and collectively, to some great person whom God was to send into the world for the accomplishment of most important purposes, and all at length, in their general features and in their detailed particulars, finding an exact and perfect accomplishment in the life and history, in the miracles and sufferings, in the death and resurrection, of him who came in God's name to seek and to save lost sinners, in the scheme of mercy which he has unfolded, in the blessings which he has purchased, and in the power and glory to which he has been exalted. This is well expressed in the Preface (p. v.) to Bishop Sherlock on *The Use and Intent of Prophecy*, which, though not by any means a complete work on this subject, contains some excellent materials for carrying out this idea. The meaning of all these prophecies in which the defenders of Christianity have found proofs of the Messiahship of Jesus, predictions which were fulfilled in him, is of course controverted by the Jews, who have endeavoured to prove that these predictions, which in their natural and obvious meaning seem plainly to apply to Jesus, are not correctly interpreted, and also that there are predictions contained in the Old Testament, and intended to apply to the Messiah, which were not fulfilled in our Saviour.

This subject can be investigated only by an examination into the details of the meaning and application of particular passages, and some of the best books for assisting you in the study of this subject are Leslie's *Short and Easy Method with the Jews*; Bishop Kidder's *Demonstration of the Messiah*; Limborch's *Amica Collatio cum Erudito Judæo*, a work in which the objections of this learned Jew are given at full length and answered; and Huet's *Demonstratio Evangelica*, which contains about as full and minute an exhibition of the predictions concerning the Messiah, and of their fulfilment in Christ, as probably any one book that could be mentioned. Infidels who were not Jews have generally contented themselves with trying to involve the subject of prophetic interpretation and proof in mist and obscurity, without entering much into critical details as to the exact meaning of the prophecies, probably because few, if any, of them had ever taken the trouble to acquire the requisite

knowledge of Hebrew for discussing them. This defect, however, on the part of the older infidels, has been abundantly supplied of late by the infidel rationalists of Germany, many of whom, comprising undoubtedly some of the most learned Hebraists of the age, have laboured zealously to prove that there are no predictions of Jesus in the Old Testament, or, according to the phraseology now commonly employed on the Continent in regard to this matter, have laboured to refute the Messianic, and to establish the anti-Messianic interpretation of them. They admit that the writers of the New Testament believed that there were many passages in the Old Testament which contained predictions of Jesus. But though they call themselves Christians, they do not hold the authority of the apostles sufficient to settle this point; and they set themselves to serve to the uttermost the cause of infidelity by employing all their learning and ingenuity in shewing that there are no prophecies in the Bible, just as they labour to shew that Christ and his apostles did not perform any miracles. They may have sometimes succeeded in involving in some doubt, as a mere question of criticism, the precise meaning of some particular prophecies; but no learning and no ingenuity can succeed in involving in reasonable doubt the great truths that there are predictions of future events contained in the Old Testament which have been fulfilled, that there is to be found there a series of predictions pointing distinctly to a great messenger of God who was to rise up among the Jews, and that this series of predictions has been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Of late God has been pleased to raise up in Germany men quite equal to the most distinguished rationalists in talent and learning, and with much sounder views of divine truth and of the word of God, who have successfully contended for the existence of predictions, properly so called, in the Old Testament, for the Messianic interpretation of them, and for the literal fulfilment of them in the life and religion of Jesus;¹ and as they had to deal with men who had taken up thoroughly infidel ground, their works are not only very valuable in a critical point of view, or as specimens of scriptural interpretation, but are most important in their bearing

¹ Hengstenberg, of Berlin, *Christology* and *Introduction to the Psalms*, and *Commentary* on them, which have been translated into English, and are well deserving of perusal.

upon the proof of Christ's Messiahship, and thus upon the general truth of Christianity.

Before concluding this subject of prophecy, and thereby finishing the outline of the external evidences, we have merely to notice that this topic comprehends also predictions ascribed to our Saviour, and alleged to have been fulfilled; more especially concerning his own death and resurrection, the destruction of Jerusalem, the fate of the Jews, the success of his cause, and the history of his church.¹ If it can be proved, as it can, that these predictions were made and were afterwards fulfilled, or are now fulfilling, then they are just miracles wrought by Christ, and operate simply as miracles in proving, not indeed his Messiahship, but his claim to be received as a teacher sent from God.

I have now given you a brief outline or skeleton of the external evidences for the truth of Christianity, or of the proof of, or rather the mode of proving, the credibility of the messengers, as distinguished from the credibility of the message, and pointed out what seems to be at once the most natural and the most logically correct order of developing the whole train of thought in its different departments by which the ultimate conclusion that Christ and his immediate followers were commissioned by God, and authorised to speak in his name, may be reached and established. You must fill up the outline by your own study and meditation, by the careful perusal of works where the information necessary for establishing some of the leading positions is collected and applied, and by making both the facts and the arguments the subject of fixed and deliberate reflection, until they are so impressed upon your understandings and memories as to be ever ready for use, if needful, in convincing men of the truth of Christianity. And I trust that, in investigating this matter, you will take care to cherish ever yourselves, and when necessary inculcate upon others, the state of mind and heart so evidently required in our Saviour's statements which may be regarded as embodying by implication what is a precept equally of natural and revealed religion: "If any man will do his will (ἐάν τις τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ ποιῇ), he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God" (John vii. 17).

¹ Horne's *Table of Prophecies*, in Appendix to vol. i.

LECTURE XV.

INTERNAL EVIDENCES OF THE GENERAL TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE second leading division under which the evidences of Christianity are usually classed, is the internal evidences, or the proof of its truth and divine origin that may be derived from the nature of the message, as distinguished from the character and credibility, or, in one word, the testimony of the messengers. Jesus and his apostles professed to be commissioned by God to reveal his will to men, and on this ground claimed that men should receive, as coming from God, what they taught and enjoined. They produced the credentials of their claims in miracles and the fulfilment of prophecies, which are obviously fitted to establish a divine attestation, *i.e.* to convey a virtual declaration on God's part that they were to be received as his messengers. We found, however, in considering how it is that miracles, thoroughly established by satisfactory evidence, afford a proof of the divine authority of the doctrines in connection with the proclamation of which they are wrought, that there is good reason to doubt whether the argument from miracles can be fully established without *some* reference to the character of the doctrine promulgated. This doubt arises from the consideration that it does not seem practicable to prove either from reason or revelation—though it is with reason alone, or natural theology, we have to do in the matter at this stage of the argument, when we are dealing with infidels—that God alone can work miracles, or even to prove the impossibility of invisible beings adverse to God and his cause being able to do, and being permitted to do, what we could not but regard as miracles. We can prove indeed that the good Being who governs the world, and has all things under his sove-

reign control, will not allow his rational and responsible creatures to be deceived, without giving them some sufficient means of ascertaining the truth in the matter. But we cannot prove that the means of ascertaining whether the miracles came from himself, and are proofs of his approbation, must necessarily be found in the nature and accompanying circumstances of the miracles themselves; and hence the necessity of having some reference to the general character of the doctrines, and of the system in connection with which the miracles were wrought. But the difficulty lies, as I formerly remarked, solely in the abstract questions which may be started in connection with this subject; for there is no practical difficulty in proving that the doctrine of Christ and his apostles, or the Christian revelation, did not come from wicked beings, adversaries of God and righteousness, and that therefore, being supported by well authenticated miracles, it must have come from God himself. The investigation of this subject necessarily leads to some consideration of the nature of the message, the character of the revelation, viewed in connection with what we already know about God and his character and government from the informations of natural theology; and Dr Chalmers, with the candour natural to great minds, has told us that the investigation of this subject, of the connection between the reality of the miracles and the truth of the doctrine, had produced some modification of the views he once entertained with regard to the subject of the internal evidences, viewed in connection with the informations of natural theology:—

“We are aware that, in this view of the matter, a previous natural religion would seem to be indispensable; whereas, in the other view of it, the whole credit and authority that belong to the Christian religion would have their primary fountain head in the proper and peculiar evidences of revelation. Miracles, simply as such, and without regard to adjuncts at all, were enough in all conceivable circumstances to authenticate any professed communication from God to the world. The historical evidences for these miraculous facts were enough of themselves to constitute a simple but solid foundation for the whole superstructure of our creed. We confess our partiality, in other days, to what we held as a beautiful and consistent exemplification of the question between us and infidels. There is nothing however which has contributed more to modify our views upon this subject than the question whereof we now treat.¹ Instead of holding all religion as suspended

¹ That of the connection between the miracle and the doctrine.

on the miraculous evidences, we see this evidence itself standing at the bar of an anterior principle, and there waiting for its authentication. There is a previous natural religion on whose aid we call for the determination of this matter. It is an authority that we at one time should have utterly disregarded and contemned ; but now hold it in higher reverence, since, reflecting on the supremacy of conscience within us, we deem this to be the token of an ascendant principle of morality and truth in the universe around us.”¹

There are two general questions in regard to this subject that obviously present themselves, and demand some attention :—1st, Is there anything in the revelation given us by Christ and his apostles in the message they have brought us, which affords any good ground to doubt or deny that it came from God ? and 2d, Is there anything in this revelation that affords a positive proof or presumption that it came from him ? Now, at present you will recollect that we are not investigating the question of the divine authority of the books of Scripture, but only the general truth of the Christian revelation ; and that therefore we have not at present to do either with the objections deduced from, or the confirmations based upon, particular passages of the Scriptures, but only with the leading features of the revelation in general, its doctrines, and its morality.

Objections to the contents of revelation, and especially to the doctrines of Christianity, are much more easily got up than objections to its proper direct historical evidence. There is something in fabricating and in enforcing such objections that is gratifying to the pride of human reason, and therefore this has generally been a favourite field for the exercise of the ingenuity of infidels. They have been accustomed to allege and to attempt to prove that that there are things in the Christian revelation which are absurd or contrary to reason, contradictory to or inconsistent with each other, opposed to correct notions of the divine character and government, and even injurious to the interests of morality ; and that, consequently, it did not come from God, and is unworthy of the confidence and submission of rational men. All this has been alleged by infidels, who have appealed to specific doctrines of Christianity in support of these general objections, and all these allegations have been answered and exposed by the defenders of revelation. I have no doubt of the general truth of the position which Dr Chalmers has laid down and enforced upon this subject,

¹ Chalmers's *Evidences*, book vi. chap. viii. vol. i. pp. 384, 385.

that these objections of infidels have been treated with much more attention than they deserved, and that as the objections originated commonly in unwarranted and presumptuous speculation upon subjects in regard to which the natural reason of man is by no means a safe or certain guide, so there has been a good deal of unnecessary and sometimes presumptuous speculation exhibited by the defenders of Christianity in answering them. And perhaps a still worse result has been that some of the defenders of Christianity, having themselves very defective and erroneous views of the doctrines of the gospel, as was certainly the case with many of those who chiefly conducted the defence of revelation against the English infidels of the early part of last century, have been led to explain away the doctrines of Christianity, to prune them down to what the natural reason of man might be inclined to receive as true and probable, and to reduce the Christian revelation to little more than a republication of the law of nature. At the same time, it seems undeniable that such objections are in their general nature and character relevant, and that it is needful to dispose of them. If it be alleged upon plausible grounds that anything contained in the Christian revelation is contrary to the plain dictates of reason; that it involves a contradiction, or is opposed to some other part of the revelation itself; that it is dishonouring to God, or injurious to morality; it seems reasonable and necessary that these allegations should be disproved, and the doctrines objected to vindicated, although certainly much more use ought to be made in this work of vindication than has been done by many of the defenders of Christianity of these two important and fundamental considerations, viz.—1st, The weakness of human reason and man's ignorance of God—their incapacity of determining with certainty *a priori* what is worthy of God, accordant with his character and government, fitted to promote his purposes, and might therefore be reasonably expected in a revelation that professed to come from him; and 2d, The unreasonable and unphilosophical character of the notion that the direct and proper proof in support of the truth of a revelation, while unassailable upon the ground of its own proper merits as a proof, may be virtually set aside or disregarded upon the ground of mere difficulties which may not admit of being all directly explained and cleared away, and especially difficulties

based upon topics of speculation which in their full magnitude and extent lie very much beyond the cognizance of the human faculties. Where the evils formerly adverted to, and especially that of explaining away the real doctrines taught in Scripture, are avoided, and these principles now stated are kept steadily in view, it might be necessary and useful to shew, in regard to the particular doctrines of Christianity objected against, that though in some cases above reason, they are not contrary to reason; that they involve no contradiction or inconsistency; that they contradict nothing which we know with certainty about God from any other source; and that they are not dishonouring to him, or injurious to morality. And though there has occasionally been some rash and presumptuous speculation exhibited in repelling as well as in enforcing such objections as those we now refer to, there has also been much valuable matter brought out in this way that is fitted to promote the cause of truth and of sound doctrine. I shall give one instance of this. Bishop Conybeare, who succeeded Butler in the see of Bristol, and who was no unworthy successor even of that great man, having written a very masterly work, entitled *A Defence of Revealed Religion* in reply to Tindal, &c., has a very able sermon *On the Nature, Possibility, and Certainty of Miracles*. In this sermon, after establishing the certainty of the miracles of the New Testament, he admits "that no miracles whatsoever can prove a doctrine to be divine which is absurd, which either contradicts itself or any other known and certain truth, or is inconsistent with any of the perfections of the divine nature." He then proceeds to shew that "there is nothing in the Christian scheme absurd or inconsistent with the divine attributes." And after illustrating the important distinction between a doctrine being above reason and contrary to reason, he concludes "that all arguments against our religion drawn from the matter of it are impertinent, unless they prove that it in some way or other implies a contradiction." He then goes on to shew that this cannot be established; and, referring, as to a commonly alleged instance of contradiction, to the doctrine of the Trinity, he gives the following beautifully clear, precise, and satisfactory explanation upon that point:—

"To assert indeed that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three distinct infinite beings, and yet but one being, is an express contradiction. To assert

that they are three distinct beings, of which two are inferior, and yet each God, is either to use the term God equivocally in this case (which makes one part of Scripture contradict another), or else is an express contradiction. But to assert that there is but one divine nature or essence, that this undivided essence is common to three persons, that by person, when applied to God, we do not mean the same as when applied to men, but only somewhat analogous to it, that we have no adequate idea of what is meant by the word person when applied to God, and use it only because distinct personal attributes and actions are ascribed to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in Scripture, is no contradiction ; we do not assert that one is three, and three one (as we are falsely charged), but only that what are three in one respect may be *three* only in another. We do not assert that three beings are one being, that three persons are one person, or that three intelligent beings are one intelligent being (as the word person signifies when applied to men), but only that in the same undivided nature there are three differences analogous to personal differences amongst men ; and though we cannot precisely determine what these differences are, we have no more reason to conclude them impossible than a blind man hath to conclude the impossibility of colours because he cannot see them.”¹

The substance of what is contained in this extract is of course to be found in many authors when defending the doctrine of the Trinity ; but I do not know that it has ever been better put than in this sermon on miracles.

But the advocates of Christianity are not contented with proving that there is nothing in the Christian revelation which affords any ground in right reason for denying or even doubting that it came from God, nothing but what leaves the proper direct historical and miraculous evidence that Christ and his apostles were commissioned by God, untouched and unimpaired, to exert its own appropriate influence. They have also in general founded upon the character and contents of the revelation, a positive proof that it came from God through their instrumentality. They have differed indeed about the precise value and weight of this evidence, but almost all have admitted that it does go to confirm or corroborate the proof for the divine origin of Christianity, that it has some weight probative or presumptive. The Christian revelation contains and unfolds a system of doctrine and a system of morality or duty, and the question is : Do we, when we examine this system of doc-

¹ Conybeare's Sermon on *The Nature, Possibility, and Certainty of Miracles*, pp. 27, 28.

trine and duty, discover in its general nature and character, or in its special features, any clear and certain indications of its source or origin. Now—first, it is very evident, and can be easily proved, that this system did not owe its origin to wicked men or to wicked beings of any class or order, *i.e.* to beings adverse to what we know from other sources concerning the character and government of God, or to the interests of piety and righteousness. But this does not advance us much beyond the position we occupied under the former head; as the practical result of it is little more than to shew that the system is free from objection. Second, it may be asserted, and can be proved, that it could not have been devised or invented by men in the unassisted use of their natural powers; and this we think is the best, safest, and most satisfactory way of putting the argument for the general truth of Christianity, derived from the character of the message, the contents of the revelation. There is something that seems presumptuous and unsatisfactory in laying down directly and at once the position that the message is altogether so good and so excellent that it is quite worthy of God, and could have come only from him. This seems to partake too much of that spirit of presumptuous *a priori* speculation which Dr Chalmers has so fully and effectively exposed. It seems to be assuming a larger knowledge, and, as it were, experience of God than men really possess; not that we mean to doubt or deny either the reality or the rationality of what has been called the self-evidencing power of the gospel and of the sacred Scriptures, by which they indicate their author and origin, by which, like the other works of God, they may directly and at once lead the mind to him who gave them existence. Neither do we mean to deny, but on the contrary we firmly believe, that infidels are often, in point of fact, led to a conviction of the truth of Christianity, by the Spirit of God accompanying the mere preaching of the gospel, or the exhibition of the substance of the revelation and the mere reading of the word. But all this does not properly concern the question we are at present considering, which is substantially this: How may a train of thought and argument be best exhibited and laid out which, based upon principles held both by believers and unbelievers, and logically correct and compact in all its parts and steps, may be fitted to compel infidels, unless they are resolved to violate all the laws of right reasoning, to admit

that Christianity is a revelation from God? An infidel indeed could not consistently adduce objections against revelation founded upon its alleged inconsistency with the divine character and government, as most infidels have done, and at the same time object to our drawing arguments in support of it from our natural knowledge of God. But this would merely give us an *argumentum ad hominem* against him, and would not prove the proper logical truth and soundness of our own principle. We know little of God by nature, and are scarcely entitled to speak with much confidence of what is worthy of him, or of what, because we think it worthy of him, must have come from him. But we know men, we can fully comprehend *them*, we can estimate their powers and capacities, both generally and with reference to the particular circumstances in which they may have been placed, and we can speak with some confidence as to what it was or was not possible for them without assistance from a higher power to have done or achieved.

But we have not merely our knowledge of man as man, and of his powers and capacities; we have also what is a matter within our legitimate cognizance, the knowledge of the situation and circumstances in which the particular men from whom this revelation proceeded were placed. The question is not merely, Could this revelation, this system of doctrine and morality, have originated with men? but, Could it have originated with men placed in the situation and circumstances of Christ and his apostles? They were illiterate Jews, and we have some means of knowing what this implies in regard to their mental cultivation and acquirements, their capacities and opportunities. And even though we should lay aside the idea of their being illiterate, and suppose them to have had full and ready access to all the philosophy and science, to all the knowledge and literature that then existed in the world, still we can estimate what assistance this would have rendered, and determine whether, in connection with what we know generally of the human faculties, it would have enabled them to devise the Christian system of doctrine and of duty. This argument then is in its nature perfectly legitimate; and when the principle is applied to the matter in hand, there are abundant materials for establishing the conclusion that men, unassisted by any higher order of beings, and especially men

placed in the situation of Christ and his apostles, *could* not have invented and devised the system of doctrine and duty which they gave to the world, and which, ever since they promulgated it, has exerted a most important and salutary influence upon the condition of the human race.

It is very evident, and may be very confidently asserted, that many men, if placed in Mohammad's situation, and with access to the Christian Scriptures as he had, might have produced the Koran; and it is equally evident, and at any rate can be satisfactorily proved by an investigation of the subject, that men, and especially men placed in the situation of Christ and his apostles, could *not* have produced the scheme which is developed in the New Testament. The proof of this must of course be derived from a detailed investigation of the scheme itself in its leading features, and in its particular details viewed in connection with the attainments men had already, when this scheme was promulgated, reached in the knowledge of God and of duty, and in connection with the great objects which the scheme was intended to effect. The development of the harmony and excellence, the beauty and sublimity, the wisdom and efficacy, in short, the exalted and superhuman character of the matter of the Christian revelation, of the scheme of doctrine and morality unfolded in the Bible, afford full scope and exercise of the highest powers and faculties with which men have ever been gifted; and we are very sure that those who are best qualified for appreciating all this themselves, and for developing it before the minds of others, will be the most ready to acknowledge that to have originally discovered and devised the scheme far transcends the powers and capacities of men, and that therefore it did not originate with the humble and illiterate Jews who first promulgated it to the world, and through whose instrumentality it has become known to us.

But if the scheme did not originate with Jesus and his immediate followers, viewing them of course simply as men, and with reference to the ordinary powers and capacities of men, unassisted by any beings of a superior order of intelligence, as the condition of the present argument evidently requires, the question remains, *Who* was its author, from what source did it come? These men who promulgated it to the world have assured us that they received it from God, and were commanded by him

to make it known to men; and they have given us abundant evidence, in their sufferings and miracles, not only that they believed this, but that it really was so. At present, however, we are precluded from having recourse to this source of knowledge or proof, and must confine ourselves to the character and contents of the revelation itself. But the same conclusion is easily enough reached without relying on the averment of the first promulgators of the scheme. It could not have proceeded from wicked beings, whether human or superhuman; it could not have been devised or fabricated by men, for it far transcends the powers and capacities of man. The only other alternatives are, that it came from God, or what is practically and substantially the same thing, from some superior order of holy intelligences, who reflect God's perfections, and act in all things, in entire submission to his will and in full accordance with his commandments, and who, if they were concerned in the matter at all, must have acted solely as his agents or instruments in communicating to the first promulgators of the scheme among men what *they* in this way were equally his agents or instruments in communicating it to us. In investigating the character and contents of the Christian revelation, the scheme of doctrine and duty unfolded in the New Testament, for the purpose of ascertaining whether it gives any indications of its alleged divine origin, some writers on Christian evidence have referred to the character of our blessed Saviour portrayed in the New Testament, as containing something perfectly original, different from and superior to everything that had ever before been exhibited among men, and which the fishermen and the publicans of Galilee could never have invented, and could never have described, unless they had simply copied and represented the living model that was before them. Paley says that the character of Christ is part of the morality of the gospel, and so it is; the greatest minds have laboured to form and to unfold the idea of a perfect specimen of humanity, but they have all fallen immeasurably short of the picture which, without effort and without art, is given us in the Gospels of Him who is the Apostle and the High Priest of our profession. Paley, in the second part of his *Evidences*, and under the general head of the auxiliary evidences of Christianity, has two chapters relating to this subject, one entitled "On the Identity," and the other "On the

Originality of Christ's character ;" but this, in the aspect in which we at present advert to it, was not a subject in which Paley's peculiar excellences were most likely to appear to greatest advantage.

We formerly adverted to the fact of Paley having introduced the subject of prophecy under the general head of "The Auxiliary Evidences of Christianity," and shewed you that this arrangement was unfounded and erroneous, as prophecy, if it were a proof at all, was a distinct and independent proof, and not *auxiliary* to any other department of the evidences. He seems, however, to have used the phrase *auxiliary* evidences of Christianity, to comprehend all these points or topics which did not of themselves afford proofs, but only presumptions varying in the degree of their strength in favour of the truth of Christianity, and which thus contribute *in cumulo* to strengthen and confirm the general position that it came from God. This is a somewhat loose and inaccurate mode of describing and arranging these topics, and is perhaps a proof that he did not bestow quite so much care and attention upon the second as upon the first part of his work ; he has accordingly just put down, under the miscellaneous head of the auxiliary evidences of Christianity, the originality of Christ's character as a distinct independent topic, going along with many others to swell and strengthen the presumptions in favour of the divine origin of the Christian revelation ; whereas its proper place in logical order and arrangement is as one of the branches of the internal evidences ; one of the peculiar features of the actual revelation made to us in the New Testament, and going—along with the other features of this revelation, such as the morality of the gospel, to which also Paley has given a chapter in the second part of his work—to establish, first of all, this position that this revelation could not have been devised or invented, fabricated or discovered by unassisted men, and then, as an inference from this, that it originated with God, and was communicated by him.¹

Innumerable works upon the evidences, and many other works not professing formally to discuss the evidences, contain expositions and illustrations of the excellency and usefulness of the Christian

¹ Rousseau's *Admiration of the Morality of the Gospel, and of the Character of Christ*, quoted in Bogue on *The Divine Authority of the New Testament*, where are also some excellent remarks on the character of Christ, pp. 21, 22.

revelation, of the truth and beauty, viewed with reference to the standard of right reason and the moral nature of man, of the doctrinal and moral system of the New Testament, and of their vast superiority over all other systems that have ever been promulgated concerning God and duty; and everything of this sort bears more or less directly upon the internal evidences, upon the proof that may be deduced from the character and contents of the revelation for its divine origin. Much indeed might be and has been said in illustration of the excellence and superiority of the Christian system of doctrine and duty that can be regarded as affording only a presumption and not a proof that it was supernaturally revealed by God, and much that has been brought forward upon this subject, and that fairly admitted of being applied to establish the truth of Christianity, has failed of producing the proper effect *as evidence*, however useful it might be in other respects, because it was made the foundation only of such vague and indefinite conclusions as these—this system is excellent, is beautiful, useful, worthy of God, and so on; in place of being brought to bear upon the much more precise and tangible conclusion, that this system could not have been invented and devised by men, and especially by men placed in the situation of its first promulgators, which again leads, by a very short and easy process of inference, to the further conclusion that it was supernaturally revealed by God.

In reading or reflecting upon the internal evidences, the proofs derived from the doctrinal and moral system of Christianity, you will, I am persuaded, find that it gives much clearness and distinctness to your views, and enables you to see more clearly, and to hold more firmly the real character and force of the argument, if you ever keep fully before you that the precise point to be proved, that which is the only safe and sure stepping-stone, so far as this branch of the evidence is concerned, to the ultimate conclusion of the divine origin of the system, is the position that it was not, and could not be, devised and invented by unassisted men.¹ I know but of two books devoted to the subject of the internal evidences where the materials are brought fully and formally to bear upon this precise and definite position; and for this reason mainly it is, I think, that they are more effective than

¹ Bogue on *The Divine Authority of the New Testament*, and Fuller's *Gospel its own Witness*.

any others, I recollect to have read upon this particular point. The first is the well-known and very ingenious little work of Soame Jenyns, entitled *A View of the Internal Evidences of the Christian Religion*. He errs egregiously in the outset in deprecating the evidence from miracles, a specimen of a weakness by no means uncommon, that leads men unnecessarily and unwarrantably to speak slightly of other subjects in order to exalt their own favourite topic; and some of his statements upon matters more strictly theological are certainly not to be implicitly followed. But there can be no doubt that he has very successfully and effectively established, by a survey of the doctrines and the morality of the New Testament, his fundamental proposition, "that such a system of religion and morality could not possibly have been the work of any man or set of men, much less of these obscure, ignorant, and illiterate persons who actually did discover and publish it to the world, and that therefore it must undoubtedly have been effected by the interposition of divine power, that is, that it must derive its origin from God." Paley, in his chapter on "The Morality of the Gospel," has very highly commended Jenyns, and expressed entire concurrence with his views.

The other is a German work, which has been translated into English in the United States, but is not so well known in this country as it should be—Reinhard's *Plan of the Founder of Christianity*. The author does not enter into any detailed survey of the doctrinal or moral system of Christianity, but brings out with much ingenuity and eloquence the leading features of the plan which the New Testament develops for the moral improvement of the human race; illustrates it in its compass and in its character as bearing upon religion, morality, and society, and the means by which it was to be carried into effect; contrasts it with the plans devised by all the great men of antiquity for the amelioration of men, and deduces from the whole discussion the conclusion that Jesus Christ was the greatest and most exalted of men, that he was an extraordinary teacher sent from God.

LECTURE XVI.

EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCES — CLASSIFICATION OF EVIDENCES IN GENERAL — ANIMADVERSIONS UPON DR CHALMERS'S STATEMENTS ON THIS POINT.

THE third leading division under which the evidences of Christianity may be classed is the experimental, comprehending everything that affords any proof of its divine origin derived from the actual effects it has produced, or still produces, upon men collectively or individually. Now, this experimental evidence admits again of a twofold division, bearing some reference to the two previous divisions of the external and the internal evidences. The external concerns the credibility of the messengers, viewed apart from the character of the message; the internal respects the nature and character, the substance and contents, of the message itself, apart from the proof that can be adduced of the credibility of the messengers. When we investigate the external evidence, we direct our attention to the claims which Christ and his apostles put forth to be received as divine messengers, and the miracles by which they supported them. When we have investigated this subject upon the grounds properly applicable to the settlement of such a question, we then naturally inquire, How were these claims, and the miracles upon which they professed to rest, received? Were the claims which these men put forth, and which seem to be so well established, admitted by those to whom they were first addressed? and if so, to what extent and in what circumstances? Is there anything in the extent to which the claims of these men—in other words, the truth of Christianity—were admitted at the time, and subsequently, or in anything else connected with the history of this matter, which affords any argument in support of

the divine origin of the religion? This leads to the consideration of the argument for the truth of Christianity, derived from its success when first proclaimed, and from its subsequent propagation in the world—an argument discussed in most books on the evidences, though not usually under the head of “experimental.” And yet it is fairly comprehended under the proper meaning of the word, and the general description usually given of what is included in this department of evidence—the proof derived from the effects or results of Christianity. The consideration of the reception of the claims of Christ and his apostles by men who lived at the time may indeed be comprehended under the general head of the external evidences, as it greatly strengthens our conviction of the truth and certainty of the grounds on which their claims were based. Still, it is not the proper or principal ground on which we believe in the truth of the miracles of the New Testament, for that is the testimony of the apostles themselves; and while it is a very strong confirmation of the truth of their claims, and the reality of their miracles, it would not of itself, and in the absence of all other circumstances, be sufficient to establish them. The claims of Christ and his apostles, and the miracles upon which they were based, were tested or put to the proof by their being publicly proclaimed and pressed upon men’s attention and reception in circumstances every way favourable to their being exposed if unfounded and untrue. Something surely may be learned from the result of this experiment in the actual reception they met with, and in the measure of success they obtained; and the consideration of this topic may, without any impropriety of language, be classed under the head of the experimental evidence.

The leading propositions which the defenders of Christianity usually maintain upon this point are these—first, that the claims of Christ and his apostles, taking into account their nature and character, and the grounds on which they professedly rested, could not have met with such a reception, or obtained such a measure of success, as it is certain they did, if they had been capable of being exposed, *i.e.* if they had not been true, and thoroughly established. The proof of this, of course, is to be found in a general survey of the state of matters at the time, the character, views, and influence of the different classes of men with whom they came into contact, the motives by which they were animated, the oppor-

tunities they enjoyed of testing the claims of the apostles, and the reasons they had for embracing these opportunities. A survey of these circumstances, viewed of course in connection with the actual success, the conversion of vast numbers of men in every age, and in many different countries, from the very time when these claims were first advanced, the testimony of converts whose writings have come down to us, the testimony which many more gave by submitting to martyrdom for their attachment to the cause, fully establish the general proposition. These various topics form the principal subjects of the fifth chapter of Dr Chalmers's second book, under the head of "Testimony of Subsequent Witnesses," where they are illustrated with great ingenuity and power, and where especially the unreasonableness of detracting from the weight of the testimony of the early Christian writers, just because they were Christians—*i.e.* because they had renounced Judaism or heathenism; or, in other words, just because they afforded the very strongest *presumption* that they had examined the subject with care, and gave the most conclusive *proof* of their integrity and sincerity—is very strikingly illustrated and enforced. This is the proper place also to advert to a topic which affords an important indirect confirmation of the truth of the claims of the founders of Christianity, viz., the way in which their claims were met by those who refused to submit to them, and especially the important fact, which can be conclusively established, that the Jews of the apostolic and the immediately subsequent age, and the heathen philosophers who afterwards came forward to oppose Christianity, did not deny, but on the contrary admitted, the truth and reality of the miracles performed by Christ and his apostles.

The second proposition which the defenders of Christianity maintain upon this branch of the case is this, that even if we were to concede that, by some extraordinary combination of circumstances, the claims of Christ and his apostles might possibly have been for a time and to some extent admitted, though not well founded (you will of course understand that we are at present speaking of this branch of evidence as if we had no other and better, leaving out of view, in the meantime, the proper direct evidence on which we mainly rest, viz., the testimony of the original scriptural witnesses), yet that the progressive advance of the Christian religion, its rapid and extensive diffusion, and its

ultimate ascendancy over the civilised world, which continues to this day, can be accounted for only by the supposition of its enjoying the special blessing and countenance of Him who rules the world, and has the hearts of all men in his hands, and thus affords a proof that it came from him, and was designed by him to accomplish his purposes. The confirmation of this proposition of course requires an investigation of the actual history of the progress and success of Christianity, of the difficulties it had to contend with, the obstacles it had to surmount, of its utter want of anything but its truth, and the blessing of God accompanying it, to recommend it to the reception of men, and its stern refusal to accommodate, to flatter, or to bribe. All these points, and the conclusion which results from them in favour of the divine origin of Christianity, have been illustrated and enforced in innumerable works upon the evidences, and I scarcely know any particular books upon this subject that are specially deserving of being recommended to you in preference to others.

The attempts of infidels to meet this argument from the propagation and success of Christianity have been of a twofold description—first, to point out certain circumstances which are alleged to have greatly facilitated and contributed to its propagation, to insinuate that *these* explain the whole facts of the case, and thus to account for its success by natural causes, without the supposition of the special blessing and agency of God. This was the object of the famous fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. This, like every other attempt of infidels, has been answered and exposed, and scarcely in any case has the charge not only of sophistry, but of dishonesty, been more thoroughly established.

The two principal works in answer to Gibbon on the secondary causes which contributed to the success of Christianity, are Bishop Watson's *Apology for Christianity*, and Lord Hailes's (Sir David Dalrymple) *Inquiry, &c.*, both works of great merit, though of very different kinds, Watson's being characterised by great ingenuity and vivacity, and Hailes's being distinguished by its accurate and extensive erudition, and the patient diligence and pertinacity with which it hunts Gibbon through all his tricks and shufflings, and holds him up to the scorn and contempt of every honest and ingenuous man. Gibbon had not, it seems, like

Hume, laid down a resolution not to answer opponents, but to let the public judge between them ; and accordingly he attempted to answer some of the works written against him, professing however to omit any reference to the argument of the subject, and to vindicate himself only from charges affecting his accuracy and fidelity in regard to quotations and references ; and yet, though Lord Hailes had dwelt largely upon this view of the subject, and was in many respects the most considerable of his opponents, Gibbon made no attempt to answer his *Inquiry*. He referred however to it in his *Memoirs*, published after his death, in the following terms : “ He scrutinised each separate passage of the two chapters with the dry minuteness of a special pleader, and as he was always solicitous to make, he may sometimes have succeeded in finding a flaw.” He certainly made no flaws, but he found many ; and he has very conclusively, though calmly and candidly, exposed them. Hailes’s *Inquiry* is well deserving of a perusal, not only as a most satisfactory answer to Gibbon, but also as containing a considerable amount of accurate information in regard to the early history of Christianity, and likewise, more generally, as a fine specimen of cautious, careful, and conclusive discussion ; and when you have read both Watson and Hailes, you will probably be of opinion that in regard to the substance and the spirit of the works, and indeed in regard to everything but liveliness and vivacity, the Scottish lawyer is entitled to as high a place among the defenders of Christianity as the English bishop.

The other ground on which infidels have attempted to get quit of the argument for the divine origin of Christianity from its marvellous success, is by a reference to the case of Mohammedanism, representing *it* as parallel to that of Christianity, and alleging that if one could gain an extensive prevalence without being true, and without enjoying the approbation and peculiar blessing of God, so might the other. And of course the answer consists substantially in establishing in detail the utter want of anything like parallelism between the two cases, especially as to the totally different grounds on which they professed to rest, Mohammad having never attempted or pretended to perform any public miracles, the circumstances in which they were promulgated, the means used in propagating them, and the relation in which they stood respectively to the natural appetites, passions, and inclinations of men. This too is

a topic about which, though it is not by any means fundamental, you ought to acquire some information, and one of the best and fullest works on the subject is White's *Bampton Lectures*, while there is a very good summary view of the matter, and indeed of the subject of the propagation of Christianity generally, in the ninth chapter of the first part of Paley, and in the first volume of Horne's *Introduction*.

We have said that the experimental evidence, or that derived from the effects or results of Christianity, may be divided into two branches—the one having reference to and confirming the external evidence, or the credibility of the messengers, the truth of the claim they advanced to be received as divinely commissioned teachers; and the other having reference to, being based upon, and greatly confirming the internal evidence, or that derived from the character of the actual revelation which, in their assumed capacity of divinely commissioned teachers, they made known to men. The first of these branches of the subject is that which we have already briefly explained. It is to the second, however, that the term “experimental evidence” is most commonly applied, and hence what is called the experimental is usually discussed in connection with the internal evidence, and indeed is commonly regarded as a branch of it; but it really stands in the same relation to the internal evidence, properly so called, as the subject of the success and propagation of Christianity does to the external evidence. Christ and his apostles put forth a claim to be received as divinely commissioned teachers; this claim was established by miracles and prophecies; these are the direct and proper grounds on which we admit their claim, and the investigation of this subject constitutes the department of the external evidence; but the conviction of the justice of their claim to be received as the messengers of God is greatly strengthened when we find that when this claim was put to the test, or subjected to experiment, it stood the test, was largely and extensively admitted in circumstances where there was every opportunity of investigating and disproving it, and that the religion based upon it gained, in the face of every obstacle, an ascendancy, which it still retains, over the civilised world. In like manner these men professed to communicate to the world a revelation of God's will, directed to the object of promoting the moral improvement and the permanent happiness of the human race, and this revelation

has been transmitted us. When we examine into its nature and character, *i.e.* when we investigate the system of doctrine and duties which constitute this revelation, we find abundant evidence of its pre-eminent excellence. We first of all assert that it could not have been invented or devised by Jesus Christ and his apostles, viewed simply as men, unassisted by any superior power; that it could not have proceeded from wicked beings, and that it is in no respect unworthy of God; and that therefore on all these grounds we are constrained to ascribe it to him. This constitutes the fundamental branch of the internal evidence, based upon a consideration of the revelation itself, viewed objectively, and by itself, as existing in the record which we have of it. But we may subject the revelation itself, as well as the claim put forth by its first promulgators to a divine commission, to the test of experiment, by bringing it into contact with the understandings and hearts of men, observing whether or not, and how far, it is adapted to the character and condition of men, fitted to effect a moral transformation of their natures, to raise them to the highest attainments in piety and holiness; and whether or not, and how far, it has actually succeeded in producing such results in those who have embraced and submitted to it. This is what is most commonly understood by the experimental evidence; and it is justly, though, as we have endeavoured to shew, not exclusively, entitled to the designation. It contemplates the revelation itself as to its substance, and in its relation to man's moral character and condition, and the great object of promoting his holiness and happiness, put to the test, subjected to experiment; and the effect is a very strong confirmation of its divine origin to all who will take the trouble to examine into the results of the experiment, and the most conclusive of all proofs of this to those who have, by submitting to the authority and operation of the revelation, experienced its influence upon themselves. We have at present to do with this branch of evidence chiefly in so far as it admits of being presented to the understandings of men who have not yet submitted their minds and hearts to the influence of the revelation itself, but who have all, as human beings, a conscience which conveys to them some information, or at least some impression, as to what they are, what they need, and what is the relation in which they stand to God.

The first and most palpable aspect in which the subject of the

experimental evidence derived from the effects or results of the Christian revelation may be regarded, is that of the influence which it has exerted upon the general state and condition of the world, in promoting, wherever it has been promulgated, not only civilisation and refinement, but sounder views of God and his worship, and a higher standard of morality and virtue than any other system, whether professing to have been derived immediately from God or not, has ever produced; and some useful and interesting books have been written upon this subject, particularly Ryan's *History of the Effects of Religion*, and Bishop Porteous on *The Beneficial Effects of Christianity*. Infidels have sometimes adduced it as a presumption against the divine origin of Christianity, that it has done so little for the improvement of the human race; but it is sufficient not only for answering the objection, but for affording a certain degree of presumption in favour of the truth of our religion, to prove, as can be easily done—first, that the knowledge and worship of God, and the knowledge and practice of moral duty, have always been, in countries where Christianity was known and professed, greatly better, upon the whole, than where it was unknown; and second, that in countries where Christianity has been professed, there has been always a very marked and decided superiority over all others in moral character and conduct exhibited by those who manifested the greatest knowledge of the Christian revelation, and the highest respect for its authority.

This leads us to advert to another branch of the subject, which is more strictly and properly experimental—that, namely, derived from the actual influence of the Christian religion upon the character and conduct of those who have embraced it. This was alluded to by the apostle (1 Cor. vi. 9–11). Such changes as these were very frequently exhibited in very striking circumstances in primitive times in connection with the preaching of the gospel, *i.e.* unfolding to men the substance of the Christian revelation, and their reception of it. These cases were frequently referred to by the Fathers in their defences of Christianity against opponents, and urged as proofs of its divine origin and authority; and there is reason to believe that the argument derived from this source operated, along with others, in leading many to embrace it. In the condition in which we are placed, the argument derived from

this source does not stand out so fully and so palpably to the apprehensions of men ; but there are not wanting still many cases amongst us of the effects of the preaching of the gospel, or the reading of the word, *i.e.* of the Christian revelation, when brought into contact with the understandings and hearts of men, producing such results upon their character and conduct as should not only confirm believers in the conviction of the truth of their religion, but may rationally impress the minds of unbelievers, and afford even to them at least a strong presumption that it comes from God, and is employed by him for promoting the moral and religious improvement of men ; while the lives of all true Christians, *i.e.* of all who have really embraced the Christian revelation, and are living under its influence, are in some measure, and ought to be much more generally and palpably, an evidence, if fairly and impartially considered, that God is in them of a truth.

There is another and a very important topic comprehended under the head of the experimental evidence, derived not from a consideration of the effects of the Christian revelation upon the character and conduct of others, but from the personal examination of its suitableness to himself as a human being, which each man may give to the matter and substance of the revelation, and from the effects which it has produced upon himself, when he came to understand and submit to it, in changing his whole character and principles, and which it is still producing upon him, in increasing progressively his piety and holiness, and in guiding him to a more full and faithful discharge of all his duties both to God and to man. The last department of the subject as now stated is what is spoken of in Scripture as the witness which the believer has in himself, and it belongs principally, if not exclusively, to the department of evidence by which a believer may be firmly and rationally persuaded in his own mind that the Christian revelation came from God, while it does not so fully admit of being brought to bear upon unbelievers, with the view of compelling their assent to this truth. The whole of this subject, which is comparatively little noticed in most books on the evidences, is most admirably expounded and illustrated in the third chapter of Dr Chalmers's third book, which we will soon have occasion to consider, and to which I have nothing of any importance to add.

I have now finished the outline or skeleton which I proposed to lay before you of the various topics that may be ranked under the general head of the evidences of Christianity. I have not attempted in any case to expound the arguments in their length and breadth, but merely to state to you their general nature and import, and to unfold the connection of the different branches of the argument with each other, to explain to you what are the leading points to be attended to in investigating each topic, directing you, at the same time, to some of the best works on each head where the best and soundest views upon the subject, and the information necessary in many cases for fully understanding the argument, may be found.

You have a good deal to read before you can be regarded as competently acquainted with the subject of the evidences of Christianity; and it may be of some use to have a general view of the whole subject, of its different departments, and their mutual relations, that you may thus be better able to digest and arrange the information you may acquire, and see more readily and more distinctly its bearing at once upon the particular point to be proved, and upon the great general result to be established.

I intend now to make a few additional general observations upon the classification of the different branches of this subject, suggested partly by some statements in the portion of the text-book¹ examined yesterday, about the difficulty of settling the line of demarcation between the external and the internal evidences, and about several branches of the proof admitting of being classed either with the one or the other, and ranking partly with the one and partly with the other. There can be no doubt that there is some difficulty in drawing the line of demarcation correctly between them, and that at some points they may touch and mutually rest the one upon the other; but I am disposed to think that there are some of the difficulties there mentioned by Dr Chalmers, as to adjusting the line between them, that arise from misapprehension, and may be somewhat cleared up.

In order to have a clear and correct view of the various topics comprehended under the great general head of the evidences, there are some important distinctions to be attended to, which

¹ Dr Chalmers's *Evidences*, book iii. chap. i. pp. 1-13, vol. ii.

have been already referred to, but which, for the sake of clearness, may now be summarily stated together.

1. We must distinguish between the evidence by which an unbeliever may be persuaded of the truth of the Christian revelation, and that by which a believer, *i.e.* not merely a professing Christian, but one who has really submitted his understanding and his heart to the revelation itself, may be confirmed and strengthened in his conviction. All that is rationally available for convincing an infidel may also be rightly applied by a believer for strengthening and confirming his faith, if he should be assaulted by any temptations to infidelity; but, in addition to all this, the believer has sources of proof in what he has seen and heard, felt and experienced, which may most rationally confirm him in his conviction that this revelation came from God, but which might be of little or no avail for impressing an infidel, *i.e.* which the infidel could not be logically compelled, by any common and mutually recognised principles, to admit as valid and satisfactory.

2. We must distinguish between the truth of Christianity and the proof of the divine authority of the books of Scripture. If the Bible be the word of God, then of course Christianity is true, and everything that proves the divine authority of the Scriptures equally proves the truth of Christianity; but it does not hold that if Christianity be true, the Bible is the word of God, or that the proofs of the first go directly, and without any other intermediate step in the process of argument, to prove the second. It might possibly be true that Christ and his apostles were commissioned by God to reveal his will to men; that they had communicated a revelation, *i.e.* a system of doctrine and duty in his name; and that this revelation had been handed down to us, while yet everything connected with the transmission of it might have been left to the ordinary channels, and the operation of the ordinary influences by which important information is usually transmitted, without divine agency having been brought to bear supernaturally upon the composition of the whole books in which it is contained. When we undertake to prove that the New Testament not only contains or embodies, but actually *is* itself a revelation from God, and is invested with divine authority, we must establish something above and beyond what is implied

in the assertion that Christianity is true, or that the system of doctrine and duty which Christ and his apostles did actually promulgate among men came from God. An extension of the argument is necessary when the point to be proved is the divine authority of the Bible; and, moreover, there is a class at once of additional proofs in confirmation, and of additional objections to be answered, which do not bear directly upon the question of the truth of the Christian revelation, and hence the necessity, in disposing and arranging the proof—and this is the topic we are at present considering—of distinguishing between these two questions.

In considering the way in which the truth of the Christian revelation, or the divine origin of the scheme of doctrine and duty promulgated by Christ and his apostles, may be established, it has been common to divide the evidence into external and internal. It has been customary to regard the experimental evidence as being either a branch of the internal or an appendage to it. I think it better to make a separate division for the experimental; and chiefly because, as I have endeavoured to explain to you, there is a branch of evidence that may be fairly designated by that name which stands in very much the same relation to the external, as what is more commonly called the experimental does to the internal.

And then, in regard to the general distinction between the external and the internal, this is sufficiently plain, and is clearly explained and accurately expressed in the introductory paragraphs to Chalmers's second book, by the distinction between the messengers and the message which they bear. The external evidence is directed to the object of establishing the credibility of the messengers; and if this can be proved to be valid and conclusive, we are placed in the position of being persuaded that these men were commissioned by God to make known his will, and are thus fully prepared, even before hearing their message, for receiving *any* message they may communicate to us as coming from God. When we have heard the message itself—*i.e.* not, strictly speaking, and in the first instance, the Bible, but the general system of doctrine and duty promulgated by Christ and his apostles—we then examine it for the purpose of ascertaining whether it contains within itself, in its own nature and substance, any clear indications that it was

not devised by men, and more especially not by those who communicated it to the world, and that it must have come from God ; and the investigation of this subject constitutes the internal evidence. Now, this distinction between the external and the internal is clear and palpable, and may, we think, be preserved entire and unbroken throughout the whole discussion, except only at one point. There is a difficulty in proving that miracles, which form the ground or basis of the external evidence, or of the proof of the credibility of the messengers, can be wrought by God only, and are therefore at once directly and of themselves proof that his authority is interposed in the matter ; or, what is virtually the same thing, it is conceded by many of the ablest defenders of Christianity that doctrines *might* be promulgated and precepts enjoined which no miracles could prove to have come from God. And hence the necessity, before the argument from miracles or the external evidence can be thoroughly established, of so far drawing upon the department of internal evidence, or the character of the message and contents of the revelation, as at least to shew that it contains nothing which could not have come from God, nothing which of itself disproves its claim to a divine origin. At this point the line of demarcation between the external and the internal evidence must be overstepped, but at every other point it may be clearly defined and rigidly adhered to.

Another view of the distinction between the external and the internal evidence has been suggested, and it is stated, though only hypothetically, by Dr Chalmers¹: "If it be meant of the external evidences of the truth of the Bible that they are such as are gathered from places without the book, and of the internal, that they are gathered from places within the book, it will be found of its largest and strongest evidence that it comes not properly or fully under either the one head or the other." This statement is undoubtedly true upon the assumed definition of the distinction ; but then this definition is not the same as that which is usually applied to the distinction between the external and the internal, and which Dr Chalmers himself had formerly explained as based upon the difference between the credibility of the messengers and the intrinsic evidence of the truth of the message ;

¹ Chap. i. book iii. p. 8, vol. ii.

it is a distinction applicable properly, as indeed he says, *not* to the evidence of the truth of Christianity, but to the divine origin of the Bible, and it thus disregards a distinction which we formerly explained and enforced; and it is a distinction, moreover, which has seldom if ever been made by writers upon this subject, and which serves no good and useful purpose whatever. Dr Chalmers has shewn that if this definition of the distinction between the external and the internal evidence be adopted, it involves in inextricable confusion any attempt to run the line of demarcation between them; and therefore it would be much better to drop it altogether, and to adhere to the distinction generally understood and recognised, and previously adopted by himself, between the credibility of the messengers and the intrinsic evidence of the message itself, as constituting the proper difference between the external and the internal evidences. The internal evidence is indeed derived exclusively from what is contained in the Bible, because we cannot ascertain certainly from any other source what the message is; but then the external evidence, though strictly confined, according to the proper definition of it, to the object of establishing the credibility of the messengers, cannot be brought out and established except by drawing also largely upon what is contained in the Bible itself. It is to be observed, however, that in dealing with what is contained in the Bible, while we are discussing the external evidence or establishing the credibility of the messengers, we do not contemplate it as either being or containing a divine revelation—*i.e.* a general system of doctrine or duty—but simply as a collection of historical documents, the declarations of the parties, the testimony given by them and concerning them, and generally the materials from which we may determine the question whether or not they spoke the truth when they laid down this fundamental, and yet in a certain sense preliminary or preparatory position, *viz.*, that they were commissioned by God to make known his will; in short, we may make use of the books of Scripture in the first instance, and when examining the external evidence, not for the purpose of ascertaining what the message was, but for the purpose of ascertaining who and what the men were who brought it, what claims they advanced, and what evidence they adduced in support of these claims.

The crossing and confusion, the difficulty of adjusting the line

between the external and the internal, which Dr Chalmers has described and exposed, arise wholly from his introducing a different definition of what external and internal mean—a definition that serves no purpose whatever but just to produce this confusion, instead of adhering to the generally recognised and intelligible distinction between the proof of the credibility of the messengers and the intrinsic evidence of the truth of the message—a distinction which, except in the one point above explained, can be fully followed out without crossing and without confusion.

When these principles and distinctions are kept in view, it becomes no very difficult matter to see how the different materials that rank under the general head of the evidences ought to be classified and arranged; and we venture to think that the arrangement of these topics which we have sketched in some preceding lectures commends itself as being at once the most natural and obvious, and at the same time the most logical and correct.



LECTURE XVII.

LITERARY HISTORY OF THE EVIDENCES — FATHERS —
VIVES, MORNAY, GROTIUS, HUET, BAXTER, OWEN,
STILLINGFLEET.

IN giving you a brief outline of the different topics which enter into the general subject of the Christian evidences, with the view especially of explaining their connection and relations, and directing your attention to what the points are which ought chiefly to be considered under each head, I have commonly taken the opportunity of referring under each division to some of the books which it might be useful to you to peruse, for the purpose of procuring further information, having respect in the selection of the works recommended at once to the worth and value of the books, and to their accessibility, or their being such as might probably be within your reach. I must repeat what I have already told you more than once, that you cannot be regarded as competently acquainted with the evidences of Christianity, unless, in addition to what you may learn from the text-book and lectures, you read a good deal upon the subject. In running over the evidences, I have repeatedly had occasion to advert to topics where the argument depended essentially upon the details of historical proof to be found more or less fully in the different works which treat of the evidences, and with which of course it was necessary for you, that you might understand the subject, to make yourselves acquainted by reading. There is a vast field of literature comprehended under the head of the evidences, and it is with only a very small portion of the works upon this subject that you can, at the present stage of your studies, make yourselves familiar. You should in general make it a rule to read and

study books, according as you may have leisure and opportunity, upon the subjects which are at the time occupying our attention in the class, making it your object as much as possible, by reading and reflection, to become thoroughly acquainted with each topic as it passes in review before you, and not to let it pass until you have formed a clear and distinct conception of its meaning, bearing, and value, the grounds on which it rests, the difficulties with which it may be attended, and the way and manner in which these difficulties are to be solved or removed. All this you must do if you would be fully and intelligently acquainted with this subject, and you must do it each one for himself, because no other can do it for you.

It may not be unprofitable or uninteresting to lay before you now a brief notice of some of the leading points in the literary history of the subject of the evidences, and then subjoin some observations that may contribute to assist you in your future study of it. In turning our thoughts to the subject of the literary history of the evidences of Christianity, our attention is naturally directed, in the first place, to the way in which the first promulgators of Christianity, and their followers in primitive times, defended its divine origin and authority against those who denied or questioned its claims. The early Fathers had to defend the Christian religion against the calumnies with which it was assailed, to plead for toleration upon the ground that there was no sufficient reason in their doctrines or in their conduct why they should be persecuted, and to defend their religion against the objections both of Jews and heathens; and some of the works which they wrote and published for these purposes have come down to us. The principal are—Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Tertullian, Origen, Minucius Felix, Arnobius, Lactantius, and Cyril of Alexandria. Most of them are valuable and interesting rather in a historical than in an argumentative point of view—*i.e.* rather for the information they give us, directly or incidentally, about the views, conduct, and condition of the primitive Christians and the early church, than because they contain many specimens of what would now be reckoned very close and conclusive reasoning in support of the cause they advocated. The main grounds indeed on which the truth of the Christian religion is based—*viz.*, miracles and prophecy—are brought forward and illustrated, and especially the

latter, because the Jews and Pagans of those days admitted the reality of our Saviour's miracles, the excellence of the Christian religion as compared with Judaism and Paganism is enlarged upon, and its proved efficacy in changing and improving men's character, and its tendency to promote the interests of morality and the general welfare of society are amply set forth. Still the writings of the ancient apologists for Christianity do not contain a great deal that can be of much direct use in dealing with the more subtle and intricate objections which modern infidels have raised. But it is important to observe—first, that they contain nothing which can be said to afford any plausible handle against the truth of Christianity—nothing indeed but what has the strongest and most direct tendency to confirm our conviction of the perfect sincerity of their authors, and of their full knowledge of the grounds on which they acted when they renounced Judaism or Paganism, and joined the Christian church; and second, that the information which they give us about the state and condition of the early church tends wholly to confirm our confidence in the truth of Christianity, and in the validity of the arguments by which it is established, and may still be most legitimately and usefully applied by us for that purpose. Some of these apologies were addressed to the Roman authorities, to the emperor and the senate—a fact which affords a confirmation of the truth of the statements they contain, as it is most improbable that, even if their principles and characters had allowed them to misrepresent, they would commit themselves by stating in such circumstances anything that could be disproved.

There is another class of these early defences of Christianity to which an additional value is given from a different circumstance, viz., that they were answers to attacks made by men of talent and learning upon Christianity, and thus shew us the grounds on which it was then assailed, and the manner in which it was then defended from assaults. And it is for this reason, as well as because of the talents and learning of the men, that Origen's reply to Celsus, Eusebius's *Præparatio* and *Demonstratio Evangelica*, and his book against Hierocles, and Cyril of Alexandria's answer to the work of the Emperor Julian the apostate, are commonly regarded as being upon the whole the most valuable works bearing directly upon the truth and divine

origin of Christianity which came down to us from early times, although of Cyril's, it might perhaps be said with justice that its value now rests quite as much upon the extracts it has preserved from the lost writings of the imperial apostate as upon anything of his own. From the important and valuable use that may be and has been made in the Christian argument of the concessions of its earliest opponents, and generally of the way in which they conducted their attack upon our religion, and especially from their affording materials for establishing the genuineness of the books of the New Testament, and the truth of the leading facts which they record, the defenders of Christianity have been often tempted to express their regret that their works have not come down to us, and that in general we know them only from the extracts preserved in the writings of the Christian Fathers.¹ Many of the answers made to these attacks of infidels have perished also, and some which, from what we find said about them by those who had read them, would have been very interesting and valuable. The works of Porphyry, for example, a celebrated philosopher who flourished soon after the middle of the third century, and wrote a treatise against Christianity, is lost; and as the only formal answers to it by three eminent fathers, Methodius, Eusebius, and Apollinarius, are lost also, we know nothing of the grounds upon which Porphyry assailed Christianity, except from some incidental references to his arguments in other Fathers. Apollinarius's answer to Porphyry was greatly admired, and we have much reason to regret the loss of it if the eulogium was merited pronounced upon the author and the work by Vincentius of Lirins, who lived in the fifth century, when the work was extant, in his famous *Commonitorium* in defence of tradition, a work which has been always in great favour with Papists and High Churchmen (re-published at Oxford):—"Quid illo præstantius acumine, exercitatus doctrina, quam multas ille hæreses multis voluminibus oppresserit, quot inimicos fidei confutaverit errores, indicio est opus illud triginta non minus librorum nobilissimum ac maximum quo

¹ *Buddæus Miscellanea Sacra*, part i.; *Dissertatio de Veritate Christianæ Religionis Philosophorum obtrectionibus Confirmata*, pp. 378-380; Huet, *Introduction to the New Testament*, part i. chap. i. sec. 8, p. 31; Norton's *Evidence of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, part ii. chap. i. pp. 124-130.

insanas Porphyrii calumnias magna probationum mole confodit" (chap. 16).

From the remarks which have been made upon the apologetic works of the Fathers you will see that I am of opinion that, however interesting and valuable they are in many respects, and however useful some of the information they contain is in confirming some of the positions usually occupied in conducting the Christian argument, and however necessary it may be for one who wishes to investigate for himself this subject in all its parts and aspects to read them, they are scarcely of sufficient importance with reference to the object which alone you can at present expect to be able to accomplish, viz., acquiring a general knowledge of the main grounds on which the truth of Christianity may be and should be now established, to render it worth your while to spend any time in the perusal of them at this stage of your studies.

The subject of the truth of Christianity was very little discussed from the time of the Emperor Julian down till the period of the Reformation. About that time a class of men arose who assumed the name of Deists, and who under that name continued to oppose Christianity, and to labour to disprove its divine origin till the present day. This soon led to controversial discussion, and in the age of the Reformation two works were published in defence of Christianity which may be regarded as still worthy of notice—one by a Papist, a well-known scholar, Ludovicus Vives, and another by a celebrated champion of Protestantism, Mornay du Plessis. Vives's book, entitled *De Veritate Fidei Christianæ*, being published in 1543, and Mornay's, entitled *De Veritate Religionis Christianæ*, which appeared also at the same time in French, and was soon after translated into English, being published in 1579. Both these works contain a good deal of discussion upon topics which are not now usually comprehended under the head of the evidences, as they profess not merely to establish the leading doctrines of natural religion, but also take up all the leading doctrines of the Christian revelation, defend them from objections, point out their excellence and usefulness, and labour to confirm them by arguments drawn from the light of nature, and the testimonies of heathen authors. It is one of the great improvements made in more modern times in the method of conducting the defence of the truth of Christianity, that the distinction has been much better

preserved than was formerly common between the *evidences* of revelation and the *contents* or *substance* of revelation; and that the investigation of the direct and proper proof of the divine commission of Christ and his apostles is not now usually so much encumbered as it used to be with a defence of the reasonableness of all the doctrines which they taught in God's name. It is indeed quite true, as we have shewn you, that it is impossible to omit all reference to the contents or substance of the revelation in deciding upon the evidence in support of its truth, and that it is quite practicable to deduce from an examination of the system of doctrines and duties which may be said to constitute the Christian revelation, and that too without indulging in any presumptuous speculation, a proof, if not directly and at once that it came from God, at least of what leads by a single step to that conclusion, that it could not have been invented or devised by men. Still it is true that there is a broad line of distinction between the evidence of revelation and the contents of revelation, that it is highly expedient that this distinction should be much more carefully preserved than it was by any of the older writers on the evidences; and that in dealing with objections adduced against the contents of revelation, though the general relevancy of such objections is admitted, much more use should be made than has often been done of the natural incapacity of men to judge fully of the matters which these objections respect, and of the submission and obedience justly due to what has been proved upon its own appropriate evidence—evidence unassailable upon its own proper ground—to be a divine communication. These considerations were not much attended to by many of the older writers, and accordingly we find both in Vives and Mornay, along with much good and useful matter, elaborate attempts, not only to defend from objections all the leading doctrines of Christianity (even in regard to those which are matter of pure revelation), but to confirm and establish their truth by arguments drawn from natural reason and testimonies from old Pagan authors.

Grotius's celebrated work, *De Veritate Religionis Christianæ*, first published in 1627, though the notes which form so large a portion of it were not added till several years afterwards, forms an important era in the history of the literature of this subject. It was translated, not only into almost all the languages of Europe,

but also into the Arabic and the Malay, at the expense of the celebrated Robert Boyle. It has always continued to be a standard work. It has exerted an extensive and, upon the whole, a wholesome influence upon the way and manner in which the truth of Christianity has been usually discussed, and therefore, though it does not contain a great deal of general or abstract discussion, it is still well deserving of a perusal. It gave a much more lucid and better digested summary of what was indispensable in establishing the truth of Christianity, with the intermixture of very little that is extraneous and useless, than any work that had previously appeared, and thus tended largely to guide the thoughts and investigations of subsequent writers upon this subject into the proper channel. Of the six books of which it is composed, three, though much the shortest, are directed to the object of exposing the claims of Paganism, Mohammedanism, Judaism; and indeed it was long common to have something on these topics in most works that professed to treat of the whole subject of the evidences. In more modern works the discussion of these topics has been commonly omitted, upon the ground thus stated by Paley, in the beginning of his *Prefatory Considerations*, that "really the question lies between the Christian religion and none, for that if the Christian religion be not credible, no one with whom we have to do will support the pretensions of any other." Grotius, who was a man of vast erudition, as well as of great talent, has in his notes a great many interesting quotations from ancient heathen authors, but then he applies them much more judiciously than previous writers, such as Vives and Mornay, had done; not as they did, in defence of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, which ought to rest upon the authority of the revelation, but in confirmation of the principal doctrines of natural religion, to which his first book is directed, and of the leading facts recorded in the Bible history, and especially in the Old Testament. His second book is directed to the proof of the truth of Christianity, and the third to that of the integrity and divine authority of the books of Scripture; and thus a distinction, which we have attempted to shew you is of some importance in order to a clear and correct arrangement and classification of the evidences, but which has been neglected by many subsequent writers, has been fully preserved. Before proceeding to notice some of the leading features of

the history of this subject as applicable to works in our own language, which is peculiarly rich in the department of the evidences, or of what is sometimes called the Deistical controversy, I must notice a work which I formerly recommended to you when speaking of the subject of prophecy, viz., Huet or Huetius's *Demonstratio Evangelica*. It is a Latin quarto, though there are editions in other forms, and was first published in 1679. Its author was a prelate of the Roman Catholic Church in France; and there are several things about it which distinguish it from the common mass of works upon the evidences, and render it worthy of special notice. It is a book of very superior talent, and very extraordinary erudition. One rather remarkable compliment was paid to it when it was first published. Puffendorf, the celebrated jurist and historian, who was a Protestant, and had given much attention to some departments of theological study, wrote to the author after reading the *Demonstratio Evangelica*, expressing his profound admiration of the work, and the delight with which he had read it, setting forth his conviction that Huet was peculiarly fitted by his talent and learning, his candour and fairness, to write a work upon general theology, that might tend to unite the Protestants and the Church of Rome, and urging him to undertake it. Huet shrank from this task, and well he might. It is much easier to write a learned and ingenious book in defence of the truth of Christianity, than to form an alliance between light and darkness, Christ and Belial. Puffendorf lived to change his views upon this. In addition to the intrinsic merit of the book, it is interesting to see the subject discussed by a learned Romanist, and to notice how, notwithstanding the allegation of the Church of Rome, that men can know nothing certainly about the truth of Christianity and the authority of the Scriptures, except from and through the church, its ablest and most learned men do, in point of fact, when called upon to discuss the subject, establish the truth of Christianity and the authority of the Scriptures just as a Protestant would do, because there is no other rational mode of doing it when you have to deal with men who do not admit the authority of the church. One great merit of Huet's work is, that he adheres rigidly, and in so far as I know or recollect is the first who does so, to the distinction between the evidences and the contents of revelation, entering into no speculations

in defence of the reasonableness and truth of the doctrines of the Bible, and confining himself rigidly to the proof of the position, that Jesus was a divinely commissioned teacher, and was the Messiah promised to the fathers. He enters indeed very fully into the subject of the genuineness and authenticity of the books of Scripture both of the Old and New Testaments ; but then he deals with them simply as they ought to be dealt with at this stage of the argument, as a collection of historical documents which shew what events took place, what testimony was given, and in what circumstances, what predictions were delivered, and how they were fulfilled.

Huet is at some pains to collect the references to each of the books of the Old Testament, to be found in the subsequent books of the same collection, an important object which Dr Chalmers has very fully prosecuted in his chapter on "The Canon." He has an extraordinary display of erudition in collecting from all profane authors everything in history, mythology, and religious rites and ceremonies that bears any resemblance to what we find in the Mosaic history, and may be supposed to be derived from it, and thus to afford some confirmation of its antiquity and truth ; and he gives, as I formerly mentioned, as full an exhibition as is anywhere to be met with of the predictions in the Old Testament concerning Christ, and their fulfilment in parallel passages of the New. In both these departments the ingenuity of the author sometimes oversteps the bounds of wisdom—*i.e.* he finds resemblances to the Mosaic history in profane authors where probably no real resemblance exists ; and some of the passages he quotes from the Old Testament as predictions were not intended as predictions, and of course were not, properly speaking, fulfilled in the parallel ones he adduces from the New. But still the work is undoubtedly, for the reasons that have been mentioned, entitled to special notice as greatly superior, in point of value and importance, to the ordinary mass of works upon this subject.

The foundations of modern infidelity may be said to have been laid by Hobbes and Spinoza, both of whom manifested an equally hostile spirit against natural as against revealed religion ; and the latter of whom, who has written much more fully and formally against the truth of revelation than Hobbes, and who has always exerted, and continues to the present day to exert, a much greater

influence upon the views of infidel writers, is supposed by Professor Dugald Stewart to have "very decidedly indicated a tendency to insanity, a supposition, he adds, by no means incompatible (as will be readily admitted by all who have paid any attention to the phenomena of madness) with that logical acumen which is conspicuous in some of his writings."¹

Hobbes's *Leviathan* was published in 1651, and Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in 1670, and to these works the defenders of Christianity generally had reference in dealing with the objections of opponents until the rise of the great band of English deists in the concluding part of the 17th and in the early part of last century. The first English writer of eminence who has written fully and at length in defence of the truth of Christianity, and in opposition to the objections of infidels, is Richard Baxter, so well known and so deservedly esteemed for his numerous and multifarious writings, controversial and practical, and for the extraordinary services, which he has been honoured to render to the cause of religion and piety. He enters somewhat upon this subject in the second part of his *Saints' Rest*, and prosecutes it more fully, first in his *Unreasonableness of Infidelity*, published in 1655, and afterwards in his *Reasons of the Christian Religion*, published in 1666, and in an appendix to the latter work entitled *More Reasons for the Christian Religion, and no Reason against it*, published in 1671. These books of Baxter upon the evidences have not been so much read, and are not so well known, as some of his other works, but they are possessed of great value. It is but lately that I have been led to read them, but I have formed a very high opinion of their value, and I am inclined to think that subsequent writers upon the evidences have been more indebted to them than is generally supposed. Like most of Baxter's other works, they were written far too hastily and hurriedly to be well digested or compacted; they present a good many digressions, and much irrelevant matter, by which the continuity of the argument is sometimes broken or hidden; but they contain a great deal of important and valuable discussion which, notwithstanding all that has since been written upon the subject, after the grounds and reasons of infidelity were more fully opened up, and notwithstanding

¹ *Dissertation*, Note, p. 265.

the improvements to which fuller discussions with infidels have led as to the way and manner in which the proofs of the truth of Christianity ought to be expounded, unfolded, and arranged, is still well deserving of perusal and study.

Baxter, though not by any means to be compared, in point of sound-mindedness and judiciousness, with his great cotemporary Dr Owen, and though not nearly so safe a guide in doctrinal matters, was a man of perhaps still greater subtlety and reach of thought, and therefore when he kept the right track, and was not perverted, as was sometimes the case, by his subtlety, he rose more above the ordinary current views of his age than Owen or any of his other great cotemporaries; and has in this, as well as in other ways, sometimes rendered valuable service to truth, and exerted an important influence upon the opinions of men. We have an illustration of this in his books upon the evidences, where, amid many indications of the fervency of his piety, of his deep sense of spiritual and divine things, and his earnest longing for the salvation of men's souls, we meet with some argumentative expositions of the rational evidences for the truth of Christianity, as they are sometimes called, which would do no discredit to Dr Samuel Clarke, or to any of the most eminent men of the school of cold rational mere argumentators, who arose in the next generation. The tendency at that time among Baxter's friends, in opposition to the other extreme which prevailed among the clergy of the Establishment, was to disregard or despise the rational or external evidences for the truth of Christianity, which are fitted in right reason to convince infidels, and to dwell only on these more spiritual views of the effects of divine truth itself in connection with the work of the Spirit, whereby believers are built up in their most holy faith; and this tendency even Dr Owen has exhibited to an erroneous extent in his *Self-evidencing Power of the Bible*, and in his *Reason of Faith*. Baxter, it may be believed, was not insensible to the more spiritual views of this matter, was not disposed to overlook the agency of the Holy Spirit in the production of faith, or to undervalue the witness of the Spirit; and he has given far more prominence in the works above referred to to these important topics than the generality of writers upon the evidences; but he at the same time strenuously vindicated for the rational or external evidence its true place and its rightful authority with

reference to its appropriate objects, and he objected to some of the notions that were then current about the witness of the Spirit. This exposed him to some odium, but it was easier to raise a prejudice against him as ascribing too much to human reason, than to answer the arguments by which he defended his views. In the conclusion of his *Reasons of the Christian Religion* he has the following curious passage in reference to this subject:—

“I know there is a sort of overwise and overdoing divines who will tell their followers in private, where there is none to contradict them, that the method of this treatise is perverse, as appealing too much to natural light and overvaluing human reason, and that I should have done no more but shortly tell men that all which God speaketh in his word is true, and that *propria luce* it is evident that the Scripture is the word of God, and that to all God’s elect he will give his Spirit to cause them to discern it, and that this much alone had been better than all these disputes and reasons; but these overwise men who need themselves no reason for their religion, and judge accordingly of others, and think that those men who rest not in the authority of Jesus Christ should rest in theirs, are, many of them, so well acquainted with me as not to expect I should trouble them in their way, or reason against them who speak against reason, even in the greatest matters which our reason is given us for. As much as I am addicted to scribbling, I can quietly dismiss this sort of men, and love their zeal without the labour of opening their ignorance.”¹

To the two works of Dr Owen above referred to, we may afterwards have occasion to advert. It is enough at present to observe that they are not, properly speaking, works directed to the object of establishing the truth of the Christian religion, but the divine origin of the books of Scripture; and that though they contain some statements which Baxter would have regarded, and justly, as making too little of the rational or external evidence for the truth of Christianity, they are free from any very material error; and that this freedom from material error arises chiefly from Owen having generally, though perhaps not always, kept in view these two distinctions, the importance of which we have repeatedly explained to you, but which have been very much overlooked by writers upon these subjects, viz.—first, the distinction between the evidence by which unbelievers ought rationally or in right reason to be convinced of the truth of Christianity, and that by which believers may be preserved and strengthened in their faith when

¹ Baxter’s *Reasons of the Christian Religion*, Works, vol. xxi. p. 415.

assaulted by temptations to infidelity, or which they might justly unfold if called upon to give a reason of the hope that was in them; and second, the distinction between the evidence for the truth of Christianity, and that for the divine authority of the books of Scripture. I am glad to be able to confirm the truth and the pertinency for some purposes of these distinctions by so high an authority as that of Dr Owen:—

“On these suppositions, I fear not to affirm that there are in every individual book of the Scriptures, particularly those named, those divine characters and criteria which are sufficient to difference them from all other writings whatever, and to testify their divine authority to the minds and consciences of believers. I say of believers, for we inquire not on what grounds unbelievers, or those who do not believe, do not believe the word of God, nor yet directly on what outward motives such persons may be induced so to do. But our sole inquiry at present is, what the faith of them who do believe is resolved into.”¹

“It is one thing to prove and believe the doctrines of Christ to be true and divine, another to prove and believe the Scriptures to be given by inspiration of God, or the divine authority of the Scriptures, which alone was proposed unto consideration. A doctrine true and divine may be written in and proposed unto us by writings that were not divinely and infallibly inspired, and so might the doctrines of Christ have been, but not without the unspeakable disadvantage of the church. And there are sundry arguments which forcibly and effectually prove the doctrines of Christ to have been divine which are not of any efficacy to prove the divine authority of the Scriptures; though, on the other hand, whatever doth prove the divine authority of the Scriptures, doth equally prove the divine truth of the doctrines of Christ.”²

This last quotation is the first topic stated in answer to the objection adduced by Stillingfleet, that it was injurious to the Christian religion to remove or discard “the rational grounds on which we believe the doctrines of Christianity to be true and divine.”

There is another great work on the evidences which belongs to this period, by a divine of the Church of England, eminently distinguished for talent and erudition, who was engaged for some time in a controversy with Owen and Baxter on the subject of conformity to the Episcopal establishment, and who has written to good purpose upon many important subjects, but whose permanent services to the cause of Christian truth rest perhaps princi-

¹ Owen's *Reason of Faith*, Works, vol. iii. pp. 353.

² *Ibid.* p. 348.

pally upon his invaluable works against the Church of Rome—I mean Dr Stillingfleet, bishop of Worcester. Stillingfleet's work on the evidences is entitled *Origines Sacræ*, and was published in 1662, in the interval between the publication of Baxter's two principal works upon the subject. It discusses with much ability and learning the rational or external evidences for the truth of Christianity, but does not dwell upon those more spiritual views of the subject to which Dr Owen had given so much prominence, and to which Baxter, without disparaging the others, had assigned their right place. It is deserving of notice that Stillingfleet in this work (book ii. chap. x.) animadvertes upon some views of Owen's contained in his *Self-evidencing Power of the Bible*, published a few years before (in 1658), though without mentioning Owen or his work, and that it was evidently to avoid the force of Stillingfleet's animadversions that Owen, in his *Reason of Faith*, published long afterwards (in 1672), though in like manner without any formal reference to Stillingfleet, made the important explanations and limitations of his views, which we have quoted above from him.

The works of Baxter and Stillingfleet upon the evidences are, we think, entitled to more attention than they have generally received in modern times, and are still deserving of a perusal by those who desire to be thoroughly acquainted with the subject, not only because of their talent and learning, but because they mark an important era in the literary history of this subject, and contain materials to which many of their successors have been much indebted.



LECTURE XVIII.

SKETCH OF LITERARY HISTORY CONTINUED—LESLIE, JENKINS — DEISTICAL CONTROVERSY — LELAND, COLLINS, BUTLER, &c.

PRACTICAL infidelity, and everything that was offensive and disgraceful, prevailed to a fearful extent in England during the reign of the last two princes of the house of Stuart ; but there was not then a great deal of controversial discussion about the truth of Christianity. After the Revolution of 1688, although that event was in many respects a great national blessing, and not as High Churchmen have always regarded, and still regard it, a great national sin, there was no real revival of true religion in the Church of England ; and even the Nonconformists, who, from the Restoration to the Revolution had been, while subjected to great hardships and persecutions, almost the only preservers and promoters of piety and godliness, soon fell to a considerable extent under the influence of the loose latitudinarian semi-infidel spirit which prevailed almost universally in the Established Church. The infidelity which had been so extensively generated after the Restoration, under the fostering influence of abounding iniquity, continued to exist, and to operate after the Revolution ; it assumed greater boldness, was openly advocated by some men of considerable learning and ability, and this gave rise to a great deal of controversial discussion. The deistical controversy, as it is sometimes called, may be said to have lasted in England for more than half a century after the Revolution. In this controversy the arguments for the truth of Christianity and the objections against it were fully discussed, and not a few works, which are of lasting and permanent value, were produced by the defenders of revelation.

The deistical controversy in England during nearly the first half of last century is the more important in the history of theological literature, because the infidel views then promulgated in England laid the foundations both of French and German infidelity. The writings of the English deists not only tended to produce and to call forth the infidelity which has since prevailed so extensively in France and Germany, but furnished the substance or at least the germs of most of the arguments by which French and German infidelity has been defended. Voltaire, who contributed largely to introduce into France the philosophy of Newton and Locke, was at least equally successful in disseminating the infidelity of Collins and Woolston; and although the infidel neology of Germany has been considerably modified in its character by an intermixture of unintelligible metaphysics, and by the exhibition of a vastly greater amount of philological and ecclesiastical learning than either the English or the French infidels ever possessed, yet its fundamental principles are to be found very plainly and fully set forth, not only in the works of Spinoza, but also in those of English infidels, especially of Tindal and Morgan. Infidelity prevailed very extensively in England before it became a subject of controversial discussion, or was openly defended from the press by men of any eminence. This was very much the case during the period between the Revolution and the end of the century. It was during this period that the Boyle Lecture was established, an institution which gave rise to many important works on the evidences both of natural and revealed religion, as we formerly had occasion to mention; works however which, though valuable in many respects, are, for reasons which we have explained to you, to be read with some caution. Some valuable works on the evidences were also published at this period which were not connected with the Boyle Lectureship, and which are of general and permanent value, independently of temporary controversies. Leslie's *Short and Easy Method with the Deists*, a work of singular talent, and which, from the peculiar mode in which it treats the subject, has never been superseded by any other, but is still well deserving of a perusal, was published in 1697, having been written at the request of a friend whose lot was thrown among persons who were in the constant habit of ridiculing the sacred Scriptures and all revealed religion, and who wished to be furnished with some argu-

ments for the truth of Christianity that might be simple, palpable, and portable, or well adapted for ready use in confirming his own faith, and in silencing gainsayers ; and this purpose Leslie's work is most admirably fitted to serve. His *Short and Easy Method with the Jews*, published in 1699, is a work displaying great talent. It enters of course at greater length than the former into the subject of prophecy, and fully exposes the pretences by which the modern Jews endeavour to evade the application of the Old Testament prophecies to our Saviour. His *Truth of Christianity Demonstrated* is a valuable supplement to both his previous books, and by these three works he has entitled himself to a very high place among the defenders of Christianity.¹ There is also a very useful and respectable work on the evidences, containing a great deal of solid learning and judicious reflection—Jenkins on *The Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion*, in two volumes, which was published at the same time, in 1698. In his preface he says : “ The general decay and contempt of the Christian religion amongst us has made me think that I could not better employ my leisure than in using my best endeavours to shew the excellency and the certainty of it ;” and again, “ There never appeared, I believe, among Christians so general a disaffection as in the present age to the Christian religion in men pretending at least to reason and learning, and natural religion and moral virtue.” And though much had been written in defence of Christianity as well as against it in the interval between this and the publication of Butler's *Analogy* in 1736, yet no very material improvement had taken place in public sentiment, if we may judge from a statement he makes in his advertisement prefixed to that great work, which is to this effect : “ It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much a subject of inquiry, but it is now at length discovered to be fictitious, and accordingly they treat it as if in the present age this were an agreed point among all people of discernment, and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world.” And yet there can be no doubt that the attacks which had been made upon Christianity

¹ These three works of Leslie are all contained in *Christian Literature*, 1841, though the last is erroneously placed first.

were all repelled with great learning and ability. There had however been no revival of real religion and vital godliness in England. The church continued as thoroughly sunk in worldliness and carelessness, as perfectly indifferent about all the high and holy functions of a church of Christ, at the middle as at the beginning of last century, and hence infidelity as well as irreligion continued to prevail. It is right that all attacks made upon Christianity with a show of reasoning and learning should be met, as they have always been, with better reasoning and superior learning. But the exposure of infidel objections and the establishment by unanswerable argument of the truth of the Christian revelation are not enough to secure the great objects for which that revelation was given; and the diminished extent to which an open profession of infidelity has subsequently prevailed, though in some measure to be accounted for by temporary and adventitious causes, may also be regarded as proving that nothing contributes so much to discourage and prevent a general public profession of infidelity as an increase in the number of those who are living under the influence of personal religion, and are really taking the word of God as a light unto their feet and a lamp unto their path.

Still the period to which we have referred is one of primary importance in the literary history of this subject, and therefore you ought to have some acquaintance with it. It is true of this as of most other departments of controversial discussion, that, in order to understand it fully, you must read the principal works which have been written upon both sides. In this case, however, there is an opportunity of gaining a fair measure of acquaintance with it by the perusal of a single work—I mean Leland's *View of the Deistical Writers*. Leland was a dissenting minister in Ireland, and had himself written largely and ably in the course of the controversy, particularly against Tindal and Morgan. His *View of the Deistical Writers* gives an account of all the principal works published in England against Christianity, from Herbert down to Hume, and of all the principal works written in reply to them; in short, of the whole literature of the subject. He gives also a summary statement of the chief arguments and objections brought forward by the different infidel authors, and of the answers that were or might be given to them; and as the infidels' positions are stated fairly, and are commonly answered

with judgment and ability, the work contains a pretty full view, not only of the literature, but of the substance and merits of the controversy, while it affords abundant information to guide you in the further prosecution of the study of it, if you should have opportunity or inclination to do so. I do not know any one book which contains so much useful information upon the subject of the deistical controversy, or any one which within the same compass will give you so full a view of the way and manner in which Christianity has been in point of fact assailed and defended; and it is therefore one of those books which I would strongly recommend to you to peruse. I formerly made some remarks as to the way and manner in which infidels have usually conducted their attacks upon Christianity, and a perusal of Leland will, I think, satisfy you of their truth. None of them attempted to give a full and connected exposition of the whole train of argument by which Christianity might be assailed, or a full and formal refutation of the whole arguments in its different departments by which it might be and has been established. Each generally took some one particular topic, on which he exerted his ingenuity, without trying to shew formally how it bore upon the general question, though some of the more plausible difficulties connected with particular portions of Scripture most of them contrived to bring in. They seldom attempted to give formal or regular answers to the works written against them, though they continued to write in support of their former views; or, if they attempted an answer, they commonly had recourse to mere cavilling and evasion. And yet, in one form or another, most of the arguments by which Christianity has been assailed were brought forward in the course of that controversy, and most of them are adverted to in Leland, except those which, being based upon a minute examination of particular portions of Scripture, could not be investigated in consistency with the object and limits of his work.

There was much more discussion about the contents than about the evidences of revelation, a class of subjects on which it is easy for infidels to display some ingenuity and smartness; and, with the exception of Hume, who is the only Scotchman among the deistical writers of whom Leland gives an account, none of them made anything like a regular attempt to grapple with, or to dispose of, the proper historical evidence for the miracles by

which Jesus and his apostles established their claims. Many hints indeed were thrown out about the impossibility of miracles taking place, the difficulty or impossibility of proving them, and many insinuations made against the character and conduct of the apostles, and against some particular detached portions of the evidences. But the leading subjects of more full and formal discussion were the sufficiency of the light of nature to guide men to a knowledge of God and duty, and the attainment of happiness; the supremacy of human reason as the only proper test and standard of what ought to be believed and practised; the absurdity of all positive precepts and institutions, as they were called, by which was meant, in substance, precepts and institutions which the reason of man could not have discovered to be obligatory, or the reasonableness of which, in their own nature, and irrespective of the authority on which they professed to rest, the reason of man could not easily perceive; the alleged inconsistency with each other, or with right views of God's character and government, of the leading doctrines of revelation, and especially of many features in the Jewish economy; and the alleged mistakes, inconsistencies, and other objectionable qualities of many particular statements of Scripture; the erroneous application of Old Testament prophecies by the writers of the New, and generally the impossibility or extreme difficulty of making out satisfactorily anything like a clear fulfilment of prophecy, and the difficulty of settling and establishing the canon of the Old and New Testaments. All these topics were discussed, and sometimes with considerable ability and learning, though in general with a flagrant disregard of the rules at once of fair reasoning and common honesty. All the infidel works published upon these subjects were answered, fully and conclusively answered, and the cause of Christianity gained in argument a complete triumph. And in regard more especially to the sufficiency of the light of nature, and the supremacy of human reason, the reasonableness and divine authority of the Mosaic institutions, the validity of the argument from prophecy, and the authority of the canon of Scripture, the works published in defence of revelation in the course of that controversy contain a great deal of useful and valuable matter; and indeed all that is needful to defend the truth upon these points, and to vindicate it from every plausible objection. Many of the

works written on both sides have now fallen into oblivion. Tindal's *Christianity as old as the Creation*, and Morgan's *Moral Philosopher*, are still interesting works, for this, among other reasons, that they set forth the whole substance of the infidel neology of Germany, while the latter also contains perhaps the fullest and most elaborate attack that has been made upon the divine origin and authority of the Mosaic economy; or, as it has been sometimes expressed, upon the divine legation of Moses.

Collins's work, entitled *The Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, produced perhaps the greatest number of answers of any infidel work published in this controversy, and gave rise to the greatest amount of discussion; and it concerns a topic which is still interesting and important, and which is not altogether free from difficulties, not indeed so far as concerns its bearing upon the evidence for the truth of Christianity, but merely as affecting the right mode of interpreting a few difficult passages of Scripture. Collins's position was this, that the grounds on which the truth of the Christian religion, as put by Christ and his apostles, was not the miracles which he wrought to prove his divine commission as a teacher sent from God, but only the proof from prophecy that he was the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament, and that unless this can be established, his claims must fall to the ground; that the quotations made by the New Testament writers of passages from the Old Testament as predictions fulfilled in Christ are not explained and applied by them in the literal sense which they bear as they stand in the Old Testament, but in some secondary, mystical, allegorical sense, which affords no clear and satisfactory ground or basis for a rational or conclusive argument. His direct and professed object was only to convict the New Testament writers of mistakes in interpretation, and of inconclusive reasoning in the application they made of Old Testament statements; but he all along insinuated that no better sort of argument could be deduced from anything contained in the Old Testament; or, in other words, that there were no predictions in the Old Testament which, understood in their proper literal sense as they stand in the original, were fulfilled in the character and history of our Saviour. Now, in considering this subject, two questions arise, which differ very materially both in their nature and in their importance — first, Are there real predictions contained in the

Old Testament of which the true and intended meaning can be clearly and certainly established, and which, in their true and intended meaning, can be shewn to have been fulfilled in our Saviour? and second, Can we satisfactorily explain and fully vindicate *all* the applications made of Old Testament prophecies by the writers of the New? There might be difficulties attending the application made of Old Testament prophecies by the writers of the New, and those might, or might not, affect their inspiration; but they might still not in the least affect the proof from prophecy of the Messiahship of Jesus, and accordingly this whole subject of the quotations from the Old Testament in the New is one of the most important, and not one of the least difficult, in the interpretation of Scripture. There may be difficulties, and there are certainly differences of opinion among the defenders of revelation, as to the way in which some of the New Testament quotations from the Old are to be explained and vindicated, and as to various important questions connected with the interpretation and application of prophecy, especially what is called the double sense of prophecy, or the view that there are predictions in the Old Testament which, though in the primary and literal sense applicable to previous events nearer the time when they were uttered, have yet also a real and intended fulfilment in the life and history of our Saviour.¹ But these difficulties, and the discussions to which they have given rise, and the application of the general principles involved in these discussions to the interpretation of particular passages of Scripture, very remotely, if at all, affect the substantial merits of the great question whether or not there be in the Old Testament a series of real and undoubted predictions, the meaning of which can be certainly ascertained, and which had a full, complete, and obviously intended fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth. All these topics, primary and subordinate, whether as affecting the claims of Jesus, or the inspiration of the writers of Scripture, or merely the correct interpretation of some of its statements, were introduced into the discussion which Collins's book occasioned, and which thus took a wide sweep and embraced many points of permanent interest.

The substance of what was maintained by the generality of

¹ See remarkable testimony of Michaelis upon this subject quoted in Chalmers's *Evidences*, vol. ii. p. 20.

those who wrote in defence of the truth of Christianity against Collins was this—1st. That prophecy is not the only proof of the divine commission of our Saviour, but that he wrought miracles, that he appealed to miracles in support of his claims, and that these miracles being fully established by satisfactory evidence, are quite sufficient to impose upon us an obligation to believe whatever he might declare. 2d. That, independently of any proof of his claims from miracles, it can be proved, from an examination of the Old Testament itself, that there were many predictions which, in their proper primary literal sense, apply to him, and were fulfilled in him. 3d. That there is nothing unreasonable or absurd in the idea that as there are in the Old Testament types fulfilled in Christ, the antitype, so there may be predictions which were fulfilled in previous events, and found also a real and an intended fulfilment in the events of his life and history. 4th. That the applications of Old Testament statements to Jesus by the writers of the New may be explained and vindicated, by shewing in some cases that they do accord with the true, real primary, though perhaps not the most obvious, meaning of the statements as they stand in the Old Testament; in others, that there are in the predictions themselves, independently of the New Testament application of them, clear indications of a double sense and reference; and in some again, that they are not adduced in the New Testament as proofs or prophecies, strictly so called, but merely as accommodations of Old Testament statements to events of a similar kind. 5th. That even if they could not be all explained or vindicated in some one or other of these ways, yet that this may be owing principally to our ignorance, and that great weight is due in interpreting the meaning of some obscure passages of the Old Testament to the statements of men who gave abundant proof that they were commissioned by God to reveal his will, and that though every difficulty of this sort should not be fully explained, this would be no sufficient reason for doubting or denying the inspiration of the writers of the Old Testament, and still less for doubting or denying the divine commission of Christ, or the general truth of Christianity. On all these various topics, much interesting and valuable information is to be found in some of the numerous works which were called forth by Collins's *Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, and his defence of it in his *Scheme of Literal Prophecy*.

There are some reflections suggested by a review of the deistical controversy in England in the early part of last century which I shall reserve till I have finished this historical sketch. In the meantime I would observe that the following were some of the works published in the course of this controversy, that may be considered as of more than temporary value, and as still deserving of some attention, from the arguments and information they contain:—Richardson and Nye on *The Canon*, in reply to Toland; Conybeare, Leland, Foster, Law, and Waterland in reply to Tindal; Leland, Chapman, and Lowman on the civil government of the Hebrews, in reply to Morgan; Benson and Doddridge in reply to *Christianity not Founded in Argument*; and Bishop Chandler, Dr Samuel Chandler (a dissenting minister), and Dr Samuel Clarke, in reply to Collins. The titles of the works and something of their general character and contents you will find in Leland. Leland includes in his *View* an examination of Hume's argument; but I say nothing more on this topic, as I formerly noticed the works written against Hume, and recommended among others, two letters on Hume's *Essay on Miracles*, contained in this work of Leland's. Before quitting this subject, I may mention that Leland's *View of the Deistical Writers* contains much the fullest answer we have to the infidel objections of Lord Bolingbroke, though there are very masterly exposures of some of Bolingbroke's infidel notions to be found in Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses*.

Besides these works, which were written more directly and formally in answer to infidel works, there were several to which the controversy, as then conducted, may be said to have given rise, though they were not written merely as answers to any particular author, but took a wider and more general range, and are therefore, in some respects, of more extensive and permanent utility. Most of them, I think, I have already had occasion to mention and to recommend. The principal of them are—Bishop Sherlock on *The Use and Intent of Prophecy*, and his *Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection*, and *Sequel to the Trial*; West on *The Resurrection*, Lyttleton on *The Conversion of St Paul*, Jones on *The Canon*, Lardner's *Credibility*, and *Collection of Jewish and Heathen Testimonies*, and Bishop Butler's *Analogy*. Sherlock's *Trial* and *Sequel*, West and Lyttleton, are contained

in *Christian Literature*, which also contains, in addition to the three works of Leslie formerly mentioned, Bishop Watson's two *Apologies*, Paley's *Evidences*, and *Horæ Paulinæ*, Campbell on *Miracles*, Jenyns on the *Internal Evidences*, and Chandler's *Plain Reasons for being a Christian*. Jones's work on *The Canon* contains the fullest information to be found anywhere in regard to what are called the Apocryphal books of the New Testament, or those works which, in early times, were falsely ascribed to our Lord and his apostles, including others also written by the authors whose names they bear, which some writers have reckoned canonical, but which have not been generally admitted into the sacred canon. Jones was prevented by death from completing his work by establishing, in detail, the canonical authority of those works which are generally regarded as composing the true canon of the New Testament, having proceeded no farther in this part of the work than the book of the Acts. This defect however is fully and most satisfactorily supplied by Lardner, in the supplement to the second part of his *Credibility*, or, as it is sometimes called by a distinct title, *The History of the Apostles and Evangelists*. We have mentioned Butler's *Analogy* among the works which may be said to have been occasioned by the important and protracted controversy to which we have referred. At first sight the truth of this observation may not be apparent; and it is certain that Butler makes no direct reference either to the works or to the statements of the infidel authors who preceded him; but any one competently acquainted with the way in which the attack upon Christianity had been previously conducted, will see that Butler's *Analogy* is very much just a summing up of the leading departments of the controversy. Infidels then, as has been generally the case, have taken the place of objectors; they adduced objections against the truth of Christianity, and some of them even against what are commonly reckoned fundamental parts of natural religion, their objections, so far as natural religion is concerned, being directed wholly against some of its doctrines, and their objections to Christianity being directed much more against its doctrines than its evidences. These facts, which stand out upon the surface of the controversy as it had been generally conducted, plainly determined the character, the object, and the substance of Butler's great work. Its professed and principal

object is to meet objectors and to dispose of objections, to shew that the objections are of no real force and validity, and to do this principally by shewing that the same or similar objections might with equal truth be adduced against doctrines held or truths admitted by those from whom the objections proceeded.

Among the infidels of the preceding period some, while disclaiming atheism, and professing to admit the existence of an intelligent Creator and Governor, manifested, as was not unnatural for men of their character, a considerable dislike to the doctrine of a moral government—*i.e.* a government regulated in some measure by a regard to man's moral character, and directed to the promotion and encouragement of virtue, and especially to the doctrine that this life is a state of probation and preparation connected with a future state of rewards and punishments; while some of them countenanced a species of fatalism, or a denial of man's moral agency. You will find in Leland abundant evidence that objections to this effect had been broached and insisted upon by the infidels of that age. Now, against these objections the first part of Butler's *Analogy* is directed, and its object is to shew,—by tracing the analogy between the constitution and course of nature, in other words, the works of creation and the actual condition and circumstances of men in the world, admitted to come from God, on the one hand, and natural religion on the other, used here specially to denote the great doctrines of God's moral government and a future state of rewards and punishments—that the same sort of objections, objections derived from the same source, based upon the same principles, possessed of a similar character, and of equal plausibility, may be adduced against the former as against the latter, that these objections consequently are of no real validity, and that those who have adduced them are called upon to abandon them, or if they will persist in adhering to them, that they are bound in consistency to take refuge in atheism, and deny equally the existence of an intelligent Creator and Governor of the world. Leland says, speaking of the infidel authors of whom he was about to give an account, "they are classed by some of their own writers into two sects—mortal and immortal deists. The latter acknowledge a future state, the former deny it, or at least represent it as a very uncertain thing."

Now, Butler's first part is directed against the mortal, and his second against the immortal deists. The objections of these persons were chiefly directed against those doctrines of revealed religion which men could not have discovered in the exercise of their natural faculties ; and in so far as they objected against the truth or probability of a revelation having been in point of fact made, or, in other words, dealt with the evidences, properly so called, they usually avoided anything that might lead them to face fairly and frankly the direct historical proof by which the truth of Christianity is established, and rather endeavoured indirectly to set it wholly aside by means of vague general considerations or preliminary presumptions, such as the antecedent improbability of miracles, and the previous probability that if it were indeed a revelation from God, it would have been sooner given, more generally diffused, more conclusively proved, and more free from difficulties, obscurities, and mysteries. Now, Butler, in his second part, by tracing the analogy between the constitution and course of nature and natural religion on the one hand, and revealed religion on the other, or those features of it against which the objections are directed, shews that the same or similar objections apply to the former as to the latter ; that of course the objections are of no real weight or validity, or that at least the objectors, in order to preserve consistency in adhering to them, must renounce or abandon doctrines which they profess to believe as established upon good and satisfactory evidence. All this is done in Butler's *Analogy*, and done with marvellous skill, sagacity, and philosophic caution ; and therefore the *Analogy* is one of those books which it is your duty not only to peruse, but to study, both because the study of it is an excellent intellectual exercise, well fitted to improve your powers and faculties, and because it establishes many important principles which, when thoroughly understood and digested, will place you far beyond the reach of the great mass of the most common and plausible infidel objections.

LECTURE XIX.

POPULAR INFIDELITY USUALLY BASED UPON PERVERTING
PARTICULAR STATEMENTS OF SCRIPTURE — FRENCH
INFIDELITY — VOLTAIRE, FINDLAY, PAINE, PALEY —
GERMAN INFIDELITY AND RATIONALISM.

WE have had occasion to mention that many of the English deists, even when discussing other and more general and abstract topics, commonly contrived to bring in some of the incidents recorded, or statements contained in the Bible, which they thought fitted to excite a prejudice against its credibility and authority. Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, for example, is a work which professes to establish some important abstract principles, and is mainly occupied with general discussion about the sufficiency of the light of nature, the supremacy of human reason, and the absurdity, from the nature of the thing, of a positive revelation and positive institutions and precepts; and yet he has contrived to bring in, in the course of it, some reference to almost all these passages, in the Old Testament especially, on which infidels have been accustomed to found objections, and which they have usually made the subjects of railing or of ridicule. Of the works written in reply to Tindal, there is one by Dr Waterland, a man of great ability and learning, and well known in theological literature for the zeal and perseverance with which he employed his ability and learning in defending the doctrine of the Trinity. This work, omitting altogether the more abstract and argumentative portion of Tindal's book, is confined to an explanation and defence of the passages in the Old Testament which Tindal had distorted and perverted, taking them in the order in which they occur in the Bible, from Genesis to Malachi; and

we have few better or more useful books on this subject than this work of Waterland's, entitled *Scripture Vindicated*. Infidels indeed are well aware that the most plausible and effective means they can employ to excite doubts and suspicions in men's minds is by selecting particular portions of the Bible, or particular incidents recorded there, distorting and perverting them, and then making use of them for the purpose of producing the impression that the Bible abounds in things that are contradictory and absurd, offensive and ridiculous. The question of the divine authority of the Scriptures is indeed different from that of the truth and reality of the Mosaic and Christian revelation. But most men who have held the one have also maintained the other; and if the charges which have been often adduced against the Scriptures were well founded, they would not only overturn their divine authority, but militate very seriously against the probability of their containing or embodying an authentic and credible record of divine revelations. There are some real difficulties connected with the interpretation of some passages of Scripture, especially of the Old Testament—difficulties that might naturally be expected to occur in the interpretation of the most ancient books in existence, written in a language which has for more than two thousand years ceased to be a living language, recording incidents which occurred in a state of things very different from any that has come under our experience, and in many cases not giving, and not professing to give, minute and detailed accounts of all the subjects to which they advert. It does not require a great deal of ingenuity to make a plausible handle of these difficulties, and to swell their number by distorting and perverting passages where no real difficulty exists. The chief heads under which the common infidel objections derived from particular passages of Scripture, as distinguished from the substance of revelation, or the system of doctrines and duties which may be said to constitute it, may be classed, are—the alleged inconsistency of one passage with another; the alleged inconsistency of certain actions ascribed to God, or done by his order, or with his approbation, with right views of religion and morality; the alleged absurdity of some of the provisions and arrangements of the Mosaic economy, and of some of the miracles recorded, &c. Objections from these various sources, when set off with some skill and ingenuity, perhaps with some wit and humour, are much more likely

to make an impression upon men's minds than abstract argumentation; and even when they do not produce infidelity or a distinct and avowed rejection of the authority of Scripture, are yet too well fitted to diminish and undermine the profound respect and reverence with which the word of God ought ever to be regarded.

It is chiefly by urging objections derived from these sources that infidelity has ever made much progress; and if you shall ever be called to come into contact with avowed infidelity in the course of your ministerial labours, you will probably find that it is based upon, or at least that it defends itself by arguments and considerations of this sort; and hence the propriety of your being somewhat acquainted with this class of objections, and with the readiest, most palpable, and most effective way of disposing of them. You will find indeed that you do not often succeed in reclaiming to a profession of Christianity men who have made a profession of infidelity, by merely answering their arguments; or, except when the gospel of the grace of God—*i.e.* the *substance* of divine revelation itself, explained and enforced by you—is brought home to their understandings and hearts by the Holy Ghost; and this means therefore should not be neglected even with those who at the time professedly despise it. But still, for the honour of truth and the protection of others, it is proper that you should be able and ready to answer more directly and explicitly the grounds on which the infidelity you may meet with is defended.

This class of infidel objections has always been in peculiar favour with French infidels, being well adapted to the flippancy, frivolity, and superficiality of that people. Indeed, it may be said to constitute the distinguishing characteristic of French infidelity; and perhaps the greatest master in this department was Voltaire, to whose capacities and attainments it was peculiarly suited, and who certainly had qualities that enabled him to set it off to the best advantage, and to make it peculiarly effective. The objections which Voltaire has adduced against particular passages of Scripture, and against particular incidents recorded there, and which he has often set off with much ingenuity and wit, are scattered over his works, but are to be found especially in his *Philosophical Dictionary*, and in his *Philosophy of History*. You will find most of them collected and refuted in a very useful and valuable book, entitled *A Vindication of the Sacred Books*

and of Josephus, especially the former, from various misrepresentations and cavils of the celebrated M. de Voltaire, by Dr Findlay, who was professor of divinity in Glasgow. Dr Findlay certainly contrasts somewhat unfavourably with Voltaire in point of style and manner; but he is just as immeasurably superior to his opponent in integrity, learning, and knowledge of the subject, as he is inferior in elegance and wit. There can be no doubt that he has conclusively convicted Voltaire of many instances of ignorance and dishonesty, and has cast much light upon some of the difficult and obscure passages of Scripture. It is held to be a fair and right thing, in regard to profane authors, and especially authors the interpretation of whose works is, from their antiquity, attended with some difficulty, to abstain from charging them with contradictions and absurdities, if by a patient and careful examination and comparison of their statements, and by an application of any fair principle of interpretation, the necessity of adducing such charges can be avoided. But infidels have always treated the sacred Scriptures upon the opposite principle, of putting down, without inquiry or comparison, everything as a contradiction or absurdity which at first sight, and taken by itself, presented any appearance of something of this sort. With this view they have sometimes condescended to take advantage of ambiguities and defects in the translation in common use, and of changes in the meaning of words, since the translation was executed. This led Bishop Horne, in his *Letters on Infidelity*, to complain of it as a great hardship that infidels would not take the trouble of acquiring some little knowledge of Greek and Hebrew before they began to make objections to the statements of the Bible, and thus save the clergy from the trouble of exposing their ignorance. We have said that the French infidels have dealt largely in this mode of assailing Christianity, by distorting and misrepresenting particular passages of Scripture, so as to bring out of them contradictions and absurdities; and indeed this has been the mode of attack chiefly resorted to whenever attempts have been made to spread infidelity among the people generally.

It was mainly in this form that infidelity appeared in this country at the era of the French Revolution; and any subsequent attempts that have been made to propagate it among us have been conducted chiefly in the same way. Paine's *Age of Reason* is the

best known and most popular work in our language that has been devoted to the object of convicting the Bible of absurdities and inconsistencies, or holding it up, to use his own daring language, as "a book of lies, wickedness, and blaspheming;" and though the infamous character of the author, and the coarse scurrility and offensively daring blasphemy of the book proved in some measure an antidote to its poison, yet it is written in a very palpable plausible style, fitted to be popular among persons who have not much refinement, and it accomplished undoubtedly a great deal of mischief. It was answered by two eminent men, Bishop Watson, and Scott the commentator—the former in his *Apology for the Bible*, and the latter in his *Vindication of the Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*, a work of which the author afterwards published an abridged edition, in which much that bore special reference to Paine's book was omitted. These are both valuable works. Watson's has been much the more popular of the two, chiefly because of its style. Scott's, in the original edition, contains a greater amount of useful information, and of patient discussion of scriptural statements, and is based upon sounder principles, as it maintains the inspiration of the Scriptures, which Watson virtually abandons. It was about the time when this species of infidelity prevailed to some extent in this country that Paley's great works upon this subject appeared—first, his *Horæ Paulinæ*, and then his *Evidences*. While infidels were triumphing in the alleged inconsistencies of the Scriptures, as proving that the whole narrative was a fiction, Paley, with admirable skill, brought to light and unfolded a series of latent harmonies, of undesigned coincidences, which established beyond all reasonable doubt that whatever difficulties may attach to the interpretation of some particular passages, the Old Testament history rests upon a solid and substantial basis of truth and reality; that the men who are there brought before us lived and acted in the situation and circumstances, sustained the relations to each other, and were engaged in the occupations, which are there described. This important service Paley rendered in his *Horæ Paulinæ*. In like manner, when the discussion about the truth of Christianity had dwindled down very much into an affair of outposts, an examination of obscure texts, a mere discussion of difficulties, Paley saw the propriety and importance of turning men's attention to the foundations of the

subject, to the main citadel of the Christian evidences, to the body and mass of the direct historical and miraculous proof by which the truth of Christianity is established ; and in his work upon the evidences he has brought out the substance of this proof with inimitable clearness and cogency. We have repeatedly had occasion to refer to this work of Paley's, and to point out its excellencies, as well as to advert to some of its defects. We refer to it now chiefly for the purpose of remarking, that the state of the controversy at that time, as brought out in the brief sketch that has been laid before you, seems to us greatly to enhance the intrinsic merit of the work, indicating, as it does, that Paley had a clear perception of what the occasion demanded, and was fully alive to the seasonableness of such a work as that which he has executed with such singular success. It is right that such works as Paine's should be answered, and that such works as Watson's and Scott's should be published ; but it is necessary also, and not the least so while such discussions as these are going on, that men should be reminded that the great question, whether Christianity be indeed a revelation from God, must be decided upon broader and higher grounds ; and that, even though greater difficulties attached to some particular portions of Scripture than have ever been proved to exist, we would still have abundant and conclusive evidence—evidence that could neither be overthrown nor undermined—that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised to the Fathers, and that he was sent by God into the world to reveal to us the divine will for our salvation.

We have now only to advert briefly to German infidelity, and under this head we comprehend not only that open and avowed infidelity which expressly declares Christianity to be a fraud, and Christ and his apostles to be imposters, but likewise neology or rationalism, though advocated by men who are ministers and professors of Christian theology. Men who not only, like the Socinians, refuse to receive any of the doctrines of Christianity but what they in their wisdom are pleased to consider reasonable, but who moreover deny the possibility of miracles and prophecies, and of any immediate or supernatural revelation of God's will to men, and who ascribe the peculiar way and manner in which these subjects are commonly spoken of in the New Testament by Christ and his apostles to the influence of the ignorant and irrational notions

which then generally prevailed upon these subjects (some of them being of opinion that Christ and his apostles shared in this ignorance and irrationality ; and others, that they merely accommodated their statements to it), are undoubtedly infidels, and ought ever to be regarded, spoken of, and treated as such. Their infidelity is aggravated by the grossest dishonesty and hypocrisy in pretending to be Christians and believers in revelation ; and they would certainly be entitled to rather more respect if they threw off the mask altogether. The foundations of German rationalism, or anti-supernaturalism as it is sometimes called, are a denial of God's ever interposing, immediately or supernaturally, in the affairs of this world, or making any immediate or supernatural revelation of his will to men ; and an assertion of the supremacy of human reason, *i.e.* of their own reason, as the only ultimate test or standard of what men ought to believe and practise ; and in illustrating and defending these infidel views they have not been able, with all their ingenuity and learning, to produce anything more satisfactory and conclusive than what had been urged by Spinoza, Tindal, and Morgan, and what had been long ago answered by the defenders of revelation. As some people in this country seem to entertain a sort of notion that there is something new and peculiarly formidable in this modern German rationalism, it may be worth while to advert to some of the proofs which can be adduced that it is really nothing else than old infidelity, with scarcely even a new dress put upon it. I shall not give you any quotations from Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, though many passages are to be found there which are very appropriate ; but will confine myself to some statements of Tindal and Morgan, which can be given in English (Leland's *View*, pp. 75, 86, 87, 89, 94. Preface to Morgan's *Moral Philosopher*).

Leland, giving an abstract of Tindal's opinions (p. 75), says :—

“This author has endeavoured to subvert the very foundations of the Christian scheme, by shewing that there neither is nor can be any external revelation at all distinct from what he calls the internal revelation of the law of nature in the hearts of all mankind ; that such external revelation is absolutely needless and useless ; that the original law and religion of nature is so perfect that nothing can possibly be added to it by any subsequent external revelation whatever. And as he thus endeavoureth to set aside all external supernatural revelation as needless and useless, and all pretences as vain and groundless, so he particularly setteth himself to expose

the revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. He attempteth to invalidate the original proofs on which the authority of that revelation is founded, and particularly that which is drawn from the miracles that attested it. And he also taketh pains to prove that we cannot possibly have any assurance that this revelation is transmitted to us in a manner which may be safely depended upon. He examineth the revelation itself, and endeavoureth to shew that it is uncertain and obscure ; that its precepts are delivered in a loose, general, undetermined manner, so as to be incapable of giving clear directions to the bulk of mankind ; that, far from being of use, as a rule, to direct men in faith and practice, the Scriptures are only fit to perplex and misinform them, and that they tend to give them only wrong and unworthy apprehensions of the Deity, and the duty they owe him."

Again, giving an abstract of the views advocated in Morgan's *Moral Philosopher*, Leland says (pp. 86, 87):—

"By several passages of his book, it appeareth that by revelation he understandeth any discovery of truth, in what way soever a man comes by it, even though it be by the strength and superiority of his own natural faculties, so that all that have discovered rational or moral truth by their own study and application in the use of their natural faculties, may be said, according to this account of it, to have had the light of revelation. Supposing any persons to have been extraordinarily sent of God to make a discovery of his will concerning truth or duty, whatever credentials they produce to prove their divine mission, we are not to receive anything upon that authority, no more than if they were not thus extraordinarily sent of God. The doctrines and laws they deliver as from God, in whatsoever way they are attested and confirmed, are really and entirely on the same footing with the opinions of philosophers or moralists who do not pretend to be extraordinarily sent of God at all—*i.e.* we are to believe the doctrines they teach if upon examining them we find them to be true by reasons drawn from the nature of things, and we are to submit to their precepts and directions if upon considering them we are satisfied that they tend to our own advantage and happiness, but their authority abstractly from the reason of the thing must have no weight to determine us."

"As to our Saviour's miracles, this writer pretendeth, contrary to Christ's own most express declarations, that he did not appeal to them as proofs of his divine mission" (p. 94).

"As to the New Testament, though he frequently affecteth to speak with great veneration of Jesus Christ, yet he insinuateth very base and unworthy reflections upon his personal character ; that he pretended to be the Messiah foretold by the prophets, though he very well knew that these prophets had only spoken of a temporal Jewish prince who was to arise and reign in Judea, and that accordingly he suffered himself to be carried about by the mob for a twelvemonth together, and did not renounce that character till his death, when he absolutely disclaimed his being the Messiah foretold in the prophetic writings, and died upon that renunciation. As to the apostles, the

first authorised teachers and publishers of the religion of Jesus, he affirms that they themselves never so much as pretended to be under the unerring guidance and inspiration of the Holy Ghost ; that they differed among themselves about the most concerning parts of revelation, and preached different and even contrary gospels ; and that all the apostles, except St Paul, preached what he calls the Jewish gospel, viz., salvation by Jesus Christ as the Jewish Messiah—i.e. the national prince and deliverer of the Jews. This, which he all along explodes as false and absurd, he represents as the only proper essential article of the Christian faith. As to the attestations given to our Saviour's divine mission, and to the doctrines taught by the apostles, by miracles, prophecy, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, he absolutely denieth them to be any proof at all" (p. 89).

Now, these are just, almost in the very words, the fundamental principles of German rationalism as they are to be found, for example, in Wegscheider's *Institutiones Theologiæ Christianæ Dogmaticæ*, usually reckoned the text-book of that infidel system, and the author of which is still professor of Christian theology at Halle. But though German rationalism is thus, in substance, and as to its fundamental principles, just old infidelity, there are two things about it which are new—first, that it is broached and defended by men who call themselves Christians, who profess to believe in some sense in Christ and revelation, and who hold the offices of ministers and professors of Christian theology. It is true that some of the English deists in the early part of last century did occasionally express some respect for Christianity, and make something like a profession of believing it. But besides that their conduct in this matter wanted the aggravation of their holding the offices of ministers and professors of Christian theology, the sort of profession they made of Christianity could scarcely be reckoned an act of dishonesty or hypocrisy, for it was not usually made in such a way as to indicate any wish or expectation that they should be believed ; whereas the German rationalists, with all calmness and gravity, as if they had no doubt of their own honesty, and as if they expected every one to believe them sincere, profess their belief in the divine origin of the Christian revelation, when yet they mean nothing more than this, that Christ was a superior Socrates or Confucius, who was possessed of higher talents than most men, who struck out some better views upon religion and morality than had before been generally entertained in the world, and whose labours have been blessed by God in his ordinary

providence for diffusing improved notions upon these subjects more generally over the world.

Another thing that is in a great measure new in German infidelity, though some approaches towards it are to be found among the English deists, is, that their infidelity is all based upon and derived from the Bible itself. There is scarcely any one of their infidel positions for which they do not appeal to the authority of Scripture; and their gross perversions of the word of God to the support of infidelity constitutes one of the greatest aggravations of the guilt that attaches to them. They never scruple indeed to distort and pervert the meaning of Scripture in order to find in it contradictions and inconsistencies; and they pay no regard to its authority when it stands in the way of any of their own notions, but by the same distorting and perverting process by which they have continued to extract from it so many contradictions, they sometimes endeavour to shew that it favours even their own infidel notions. As we are sometimes apt in this country to entertain a high idea of the exegetical skill of these men, and as they have undoubtedly in some respects rendered some service to the cause of scriptural interpretation, it may not be altogether unprofitable to illustrate these observations by one or two specimens, which will not only confirm what has been said, but also shew how inadequate mere philological learning is to guide men to the meaning of God's word, and how sufficient even an ordinary share of common sense is, when rightly employed, for guarding men against being misled even by learned critics.

Wegscheider lays down the position (p. 190), that Christ himself decidedly repudiated the idea of any faith or belief in his claims being produced by his miracles, denies that he appealed to them in support of the divine origin of his mission, and appeals in support of this position to the following texts:—Matt. xii. 38–41, and the parallel passages in the other Gospels; John ii. 18–22, iv. 48, xiv. 12, and to the two or three cases in which he forbade those whom he had miraculously healed to tell it to any one. Wegscheider at the same time hints that he is aware that there are other statements of our Saviour which cannot be reconciled with this notion; but still he adduces these passages as sufficient to prove that our Saviour scouted the idea that miracles

were either fitted or intended to establish the truth of his claims. Again, the same author, having laid down the positions that there never have been any real predictions of future events, and that there are no materials whatever to be found in alleged prophecies, and in their alleged fulfilment, for shewing that Christ had a divine commission in the sense commonly attached to these words, adduces this, among other proofs of his doctrine (p. 198), that Christ had a low opinion of the Hebrew prophets ("parsim honorifice judicavit"), and that the apostles declared prophecy to be obscure and imperfect. The proof of the first of these points is Matt. xi. 11; and the proof of the second is to be found in the following passages:—Acts i. 7; 1 Cor. xiii. 9; 2 Pet. i. 19; Matt. xi. 11; Luke vii. 28.

We shall give only another instance. It is a favourite idea of the German rationalists, and is another specimen of their infidelity, that the system of doctrine which is contained in the Bible is capable of progressive and indefinite improvement; that as it stands in the Bible it is mixed up with many crude and ill-digested notions, such as might be expected to proceed from men who lived in a comparatively rude and uncultivated age, but that, with the march of intellect and the progress of literature and science, men may be expected to be better able to separate the chaff from the wheat, to throw off what savours of an uncultivated age, and is traceable merely to local or temporary influences, and to bring out fully from the Scriptures a system of pure and rational Christianity.

Wegscheider (pp. 99 and 109) having laid down these doctrines, proceeds to prove them, and appeals in proof of their truth—first, to the nature of the human mind, which is constantly striving after a more perfect knowledge of things; and then, second, to the express declaration (*disserta effata*) of Jesus Christ himself and his apostles. And these express declarations are first of all Matt. ix. 16, 17; and then some passages in which Christ and his apostles commend, as he says, the use of reason, viz., "Ye are the salt of the earth; Take heed how ye hear; Are ye also yet without understanding? Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right? I have yet many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now; When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away; Proving

what is acceptable unto the Lord ; Prove all things, hold fast that which is good ; Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God." These are the *express declarations* of Christ and his apostles, proving, it seems, that Christianity is to be greatly improved by the march of intellect, and that in the progress of mental cultivation, a much better and purer system of doctrine may be brought out of the Bible than former ages have enjoyed. Were it not for the melancholy exhibition of daring depravity which such views and such a mode of treating Scripture presents, and for the reverence ever due to the subject which is thus handled, even the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever, we would be strongly tempted to laugh at the ridiculous absurdity of these gross distortions of the plain statements of Scripture, especially considering that they come from men with very high pretensions, both to reason and to learning. These perversions of Scripture are put forth by one of the most eminent living rationalists, in what is commonly reckoned the standard text-book of the system ; and they are put forth with perfect calmness, gravity, and seriousness, as if they clearly and conclusively established the positions in support of which they are adduced. They illustrate what I have said about the thorough and daring infidelity of German rationalists ; and they shew also how little weight is due to the authority of such men in the interpretation of Scripture, when they are so evidently given up to strong delusion that they should believe a lie, and when, with all their pretensions to the possession of a reason which is fully adequate to improve the system of Christianity as left by Christ and his apostles, and with the undoubted possession of great philological learning, they are so manifestly incapable of exercising common sense and ordinary discretion in the interpretation of the plain statements of Scripture. It may be safely asserted that more irrational and more thoroughly despicable displays in the way of interpreting Scripture, and deducing doctrines from its statements, than those now quoted from Wegscheider, are not to be found in the works of the lowest and most illiterate English infidels. Such men as these are certainly not to be the improvers of Christianity ; and, with all their learning, they need not be greatly feared by those who tremble at God's word, and who set themselves to investigate its meaning with a thorough conviction

of its divine origin and authority, and with a deep sense of their dependence upon the Spirit of truth for understanding its meaning and feeling its power.

Before leaving this subject, it is right to mention that there is one department in which German infidelity has specially laboured, and in which perhaps it has done more real mischief than in almost any other, and that is in undermining the authority of the canon of Scripture, and trying, by all sorts of arguments, external, and internal, to overturn the claims of the particular books of Scripture, or of particular portions of them, to a place in the canon, or to any respect and influence whatever. This subject we shall have occasion to consider more fully afterwards. At present I would merely warn you of it, and warn you, moreover, that many German writers who are not rationalists or infidels, often advocate very loose and dangerous views, upon very unsatisfactory and precarious grounds, with respect to the various topics comprehended under the general subject that has now been referred to.¹

¹ J. A. Fabricius' work, *Delectus argumentorum et syllabus Scriptorum qui veritatem religionis Christianæ asseruerunt*. Grinfield's *Connection of Natural and Revealed Religion*, gives a very full body of references to all modern English works on all different departments of the subject. Houteville's *La Religion Chretienne prouvée par les faits*, having prefixed to it a historical and critical discourse on the method of the principal authors who have written for and against Christianity since its origin. This discourse has been translated into English, and published separately; it is the only work I know that gives a sketch of the literary history of the evidences on a plan similar to that which I have adopted. It comes down only to the end of the seventeenth century.



LECTURE XX.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND ADVICES ON THE SUBJECT OF THE STUDY OF THE EVIDENCES.

I HAVE laid before you, in the preceding lectures, an outline of the principal topics which enter into an exposition of the whole proof of the truth of Christianity, or of the grounds of the claim put forth by Jesus and his apostles that he should be received as a divinely commissioned teacher, and as the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament prophecies, seeking especially to point out their connection and relations to each other; and likewise a sketch of the literary history of the subject, including a notice of some of the most important works connected both with the attacks of infidels upon Christianity, and the defence of it by its friends. All the different topics which have thus been brought under your notice it is your duty more or less fully to investigate; and some at least of the most important works which have been recommended to you, it is your duty, according as you may have time and opportunity, to peruse. There are some general considerations connected with the study of this subject to which I would now invite your attention. And first, let me impress upon you this consideration, that many valuable books have been written in defence of the truth of Christianity, which exhibit little or nothing of the spirit of genuine Christianity. There can be no reasonable doubt that many men have written ably and conclusively in defence of the divine origin of the Christian revelation, who have never studied the revelation itself, or been brought in any measure under its practical influence. When God revealed his will to fallen men, it was with this view, that they knowing him fully might be led to worship and glorify him; that knowing

the scheme of salvation which he had devised and executed, they might embrace its offers and conform to its provisions ; that knowing *Him*, who is the way, and the truth, and the life, they might not only rest on him alone for salvation, but also have the same mind which was also in him, and walk even as he walked. A belief or conviction that the Christian revelation came from God is valuable or important only in so far as it binds and actually leads men to investigate the revelation itself, or the system of doctrines and precepts which are there propounded upon God's authority ; to acquire a thorough knowledge of its contents, and to submit the understanding, the heart, and the life to its practical influence.

In so far as all this is not effected in any case, God's revelation has failed of producing its proper effect ; and the man to whom this statement may ultimately apply will assuredly fail in deriving any real permanent benefit from the revelation having been made known to him ; nay, will incur the additional guilt of having rejected it. And yet there are very many who profess to believe in the truth of the Christian revelation ; and not a few who have argued learnedly and ably in support of it, and defended its truth and divine origin against adversaries, who do not seem to have ever felt that they were under any obligation to examine, to understand, and to submit to the contents or substance of the revelation ; who have certainly never attained to any right views of its meaning, and who exhibit no appearance of being influenced in their character and conduct by the views of doctrine and duty which are there opened up. Many of the defenders of Christianity seem never to have examined with care and attention what they themselves had conclusively proved, in opposition to adversaries, to have come from God ; and many more, whatever degree of attention they may have given to the study of the revelation, have utterly failed, of course through something sinful on their part, in understanding its real meaning and import, and in being brought under its practical power. Cases of this sort cannot be easily explained upon the ordinary principles of reason ; and can be accounted for only by the Scripture doctrine of the enmity of the carnal mind against God, and against God's truth, *i.e.* against correct views of God's character, government, and ways. The

conduct indeed of those who have laboured in establishing the divine origin of the Christian revelation, but who have never seriously and carefully examined the revelation itself, can be easily shewn to be irrational and inconsistent, because the first and most obvious inference from the truth of the divine origin of the revelation is, that it ought to be carefully examined, thoroughly understood, and implicitly submitted to. Their conduct indeed is so irrational that it is difficult to characterise or describe it—*i.e.* there is some difficulty in deciding whether men can be justly said to believe that the Christian revelation came from God, who, having access to the revelation itself, have never carefully investigated its meaning, and practically submitted to its authority. That they do not believe the revelation itself is very evident; but how sane men can be said really and honestly to believe that the revelation came from God, who have made no serious effort to ascertain and comprehend its meaning, it is not easy to understand or explain. The way in which they practically deal with the revelation would seem to indicate that, according to the ordinary principles by which men are influenced, they do not really believe that it came from God. But in whatever way the facts may be stated or explained, it is certain that many men have written in defence of the truth of Christianity who have never seriously examined into the meaning and import of the revelation itself, or who, if they have given some degree of attention to the records of the revelation, have utterly failed, through their own sin, in understanding its meaning, or in imbibing its spirit. And accordingly many important and valuable works have been written on the evidences, which, because of the ability with which they discuss particular branches of the argument, because of the amount of the information they contain, or the influence they may have exerted on the way and manner in which the subject of the evidences has been since generally expounded, it may be necessary for those who wish fully to understand the subject to peruse; but which, to say the least, contain no indication that their authors were duly impressed with the responsibility connected with the reception or rejection of the revelation itself, or were living under the practical influence of the views which it unfolds. Such works, however valuable and useful for the object of aiding in acquiring a thorough knowledge of the arguments and facts by which the

truth of Christianity may be established, have of course no direct tendency to promote the personal spiritual improvement of those who read them, to deepen their impressions of divine things, to call forth and to cherish holy and devout affections, or to encourage to a heavenly and spiritual life and conversation; but rather perhaps a tendency somewhat the reverse. We have already said that there are some books of this sort which must be read by those who would fully understand the subject of the evidences of Christianity; and, notwithstanding what we have just said about their deficiency, or something worse, we do not mean to retract the statement. But in reading such works you ought to be alive to the deficiency in point of general spirit that may attach to them, and careful to guard against any danger to which you might be exposed.

We are not indeed to expect in books upon the evidences anything but a discussion of the evidences, not an investigation of the doctrines of Christianity, or practical exhortations to duty; still it is impossible not to be struck with the cold irreligious and merely rational or intellectual spirit in which very many of the works published in defence of Christianity are written, and the entire absence of anything like a deep sense of divine things, or any anxiety for the spiritual welfare of men by which many of them are characterised. Where these feelings or impressions existed it might be expected that they would be more or less fully indicated even in works upon the evidences; and the absence of any indications of these things in so many works on the subject affords too good ground for the conclusion, even though we knew nothing more about the authors than what may be learned from their writings on the evidences, that they had never penetrated beyond the mere external credentials of Christianity, that they had no adequate sense of its value for spiritual purposes, and that they had not drunk largely, if at all, of its holy and heavenly spirit. I think it right to direct your attention to this point, and to warn you against being misled by the fact that has now been adverted to. You will not, I trust, fall into the mistake of imagining that because a man has written ably and learnedly upon the evidences,—perhaps may have written the very best book that exists upon some particular department of the argument,—he ought therefore to be regarded as a model of the spirit by which a Christian

ought to be animated, or of the standard by which his conduct ought to be regulated. You will not suppose that because he may have conclusively proved that Jesus was a teacher sent from God, he has himself sat at Jesus' feet, and learned to have the same mind which was also in him. We have not very many works upon the evidences which contain any very unequivocal indications that their authors had drunk deeply of the true spirit of Christianity; though there are some which, independently of their other excellences, may be safely recommended as written in a religious spirit, and pervaded by the manifestations of genuine scriptural piety—as, for example, Baxter's work on the *Evidences*, which I formerly had occasion to commend; Bogue on the *Divine Authority of the New Testament*, Fuller's *Gospel its own Witness*, Gregory's *Letters*, and Mr Haldane's very valuable work on the *Evidence and Authority of Divine Revelation*, which contains a great deal of useful and important matter, set forth with much clearness and vigour, and is pervaded by a truly Christian and evangelical emotion. I would observe, second, that many works on the evidences assert or insinuate very defective or erroneous views on the doctrines of Christianity. It has indeed been found to hold, we may say universally, that sound and correct views of the leading doctrines of Christianity and personal godliness have gone hand in hand; that wherever men have given unequivocal evidence of being habitually under the influence of personal religion, there they have in general concurred with each other, and, as we believe, with the word of God, in the views they entertained of the great leading features of the doctrines or contents of revelation. If then many have written in defence of the truth of Christianity who do not seem to have been much influenced by personal religious principles, it is not in the least surprising that they should have entertained erroneous and defective views of Christian doctrine, and that this should have come out still more plainly and palpably than the former in the works they wrote upon the evidences.

We have had occasion before to refer to the fact, that among writers in defence of Christianity, especially the more ancient ones, there was not a sufficiently clear and definite line of demarcation preserved between the investigation of the evidences of Christianity and the discussion of its doctrines. Infidels have usually been

desirous of conducting the discussion of the truth of Christianity rather upon the field of its doctrines than of its direct and proper evidences, because they think they can produce something ingenious and perplexing in the way of proving that some of the doctrines of Christianity are irrational, absurd, contradictory, and inconsistent with right views of the divine character and government. Many of the defenders of Christianity have too readily and too easily followed infidels in the path along which they were anxious to lead them. Not indeed that they could altogether have avoided meeting their opponents upon this field, or at once set aside all such objections as irrelevant. When any of the undoubted doctrines of revelation are objected to as absurd, contradictory, or opposed to right views of God, it seems evident that the objection must be answered, so far as to shew that the doctrine, not being one which on these grounds is incapable of being proved, may be true, and may be sent to proof. But still, as was formerly explained, defenders of Christianity have erred in not confining their own speculations, and in not insisting that infidels should confine theirs, within the limits to which the powers of man and his means of certain knowledge reach, and in not making sufficient use, in dealing with such objections, of considerations derived from the imperfection of the human faculties, the inadequacy of human knowledge, and the respect due to the authority of a direct revelation from God, the truth of which, as a matter of fact, had been thoroughly established by its own appropriate evidence—evidence which, upon the ground of its own merits as such, could not be successfully or even plausibly assailed. But perhaps the worst effect of this mode of discussing the subject was, that as the evidences were often taken up by men who had never carefully examined the doctrines of revelation, who knew and cared little about them, these men were tempted, in dealing with infidel objections, to explain away the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, to bring them down to the level of the standard of human reason, to represent them in the light in which they were likely to appear most acceptable or least objectionable to presumptuous infidels. In this way, and for these reasons, you will find in many books upon the evidences very erroneous and defective views of the doctrines of Christianity, either openly asserted and defended, or plainly insinuated or assumed.

We formerly had occasion to advert to the low state of religion in England, both in the Established Church and among the generality of the Dissenters, during the prevalence of the deistical controversy. This low state of religion both sprang from and produced—for there was a mutual action and re-action in the matter—very defective and erroneous views of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. Among the great mass of those who, at that important era in the history of this subject, defended the truth of the Christian revelation, few if any understood or appreciated the contents of the revelation itself, or gave any very satisfactory indications of living under its influence; while not a few of them made Christianity so very rational as that they were able to hold it up to infidels as being scarcely anything else than merely an authoritative republication of the law of nature. We had formerly occasion also to shew you that the fundamental principles of the infidel rationalism of Germany were borrowed from Spinoza, and from some of the leading English infidels of the early part of last century, especially Tindal and Morgan. But there is good reason to believe that the way in which Christianity was generally defended at that time, as well as the principles on which it was assailed, contributed much to the spread of rationalism or infidelity in Germany. We have a striking testimony to this effect from an eminent German writer, Staeudlin, professor of theology at Gottingen, in his *History of Theological Knowledge and Literature*, part of which has been translated into English, and published in this country, v. Clark's *Students' Cabinet Library*, vol. ii. p. 52.

“Most of the English deists attacked only the divine origin, credibility, and the authenticity of the sacred Scriptures; the contents of the sacred volume were but in part assailed, as the accounts of miracles and the system of ecclesiastical theology; but the character and the doctrines of Jesus himself were spared. The latter they generally represented as a pure and popular system of deism, suited to the people of the age. Most theologians opposed themselves to these writers, endeavouring to save what the deists had rejected as unnecessary and unfounded, and to uphold revelation and not reason, as the standard of religion. Yet many theologians soon appeared in England, who in many points nearly agreed with the deists. It is true they did not abandon the authority, genuineness, and credibility of the sacred volume, and the preceptive and historical parts of Christianity; but they purged the ecclesiastical system from everything which appeared to them inconsistent with reason, and produced systems of Christian theology

which were pervaded by this literal spirit. The constantly increasing power and fame of the British nation in the eighteenth century spread its literature over all Europe. The writings of its deists and its theologians, who were termed latitudinarians, were read, especially in Germany, with zeal and attention, and have, in connection with other causes, produced that great revolution in theology and religious opinion which has proved more thorough and general in this country, and has proceeded further than in Britain itself, and which has hence spread its effects into other lands. This great change first appeared in the German Protestant Churches, whence it was extended to the German Catholics."

There were some of these latitudinarian divines who succeeded so fully to their own satisfaction in making Christianity perfectly rational and quite unobjectionable in its system of doctrines and precepts, and in illustrating its utility and advantages in promoting sounder views than had previously prevailed concerning the character and government of God, and the way in which he is to be worshipped and served, that they not only disregarded its peculiar doctrines as a remedial scheme, but became indifferent about its proper direct external evidence as a supernatural revelation, as if they imagined that all, or nearly all, that was valuable about it would stand upon the footing of its own intrinsic reasonableness and utility. And in this way it has happened that while some topics commonly comprehended under the general head of the internal evidences (but which ought rather to be called experimental) have been favourite subjects of investigation with the best and holiest class of the defenders of Christianity, some other views comprehended under the same general designation have been much dwelt upon by some of the most irreligious and unsound of those who have come forward as the champions of revelation. Hence too the German rationalists, discarding supernatural revelation and the supernatural proofs of it, profess to believe in some sense in the Christian revelation upon the ground of its internal evidence, meaning thereby the conformity of its doctrines and precepts, as they have explained them, with their own notions of what is fit and reasonable and useful, and taking care at the same time to erect these notions of theirs into the position of the ultimate standard by which all that seems to be contained in the records of the revelation must be judged. It is indeed a noble occupation, worthy of the highest powers, and fitted to render most important

service to the cause of truth, to open up the excellence and beauty of the Christian system, its entire accordance with the highest and most exalted conceptions man ever has formed, or can form, of God and holiness, of duty and happiness, and its thorough adaptation to the character, wants, and condition of mankind. But then in all attempts of this sort everything that is really valuable and important depends wholly upon the previous question, whether it be indeed the true and real system of Christianity as contained in the sacred Scriptures, the excellence and suitability of which men labour to unfold; or whether it be some system of their own, previously shorn down to the level of human reason, deprived of everything that is most peculiar in the revelation, and accommodated to a great extent to the notions and wishes of its worst enemies.

Many of those who, in answer to the objections of infidels, have tried to defend, on grounds of reason, the reasonableness of the Christian system, or of the doctrines of revelation, have, from ignorance and inattention, and still more from those causes of errors in regard to the doctrines of theology, which are generally found connected with the want or the weakness of personal religious principle, propounded views upon these subjects that were either Socinianism, or something very like it. Socinianism is the natural religion of men who have not really submitted their understandings and their hearts to the actual revelation contained in the Scriptures, who are not living under the influence of personal religious principle, and who are disposed to set up their own reason as the ultimate judge of the doctrines they profess to believe, but who, for some reason or other, are not prepared to throw off altogether a profession of Christianity. Wherever personal piety and vital godliness sink to a low ebb, the views of the Christian system which generally prevail invariably assume a Socinian or Pelagian, or what is virtually the same thing, though not so fully developed, a Latitudinarian cast. This was remarkably the case in England during the deistical controversy of last century; and accordingly, in the writings of the defenders of Christianity during that period, you find many erroneous and defective views of the doctrines of revelation, many attempts to shew how reasonable they are when properly and rationally explained, *i.e.* when explained away; how easily infidels might admit them when freed from the

corruptions which creeds and systems had introduced ; or in other words—for this is the real meaning of men of this class when they use such language—when stripped of everything that is mysterious, and reduced to the level of what is fully and in every respect comprehensible by human reason. We may illustrate this by an example. The doctrine clearly revealed in Scripture of God's fore-ordaining whatsoever comes to pass, and electing of his own good pleasure some men to everlasting life, is one against which the carnal reason of men is apt to rise in rebellion, though we believe that the fundamental principles on which it rests can be fully established from natural reason, as well as from Scripture. The Apostle Paul gives us very distinctly to understand that *his* doctrine upon this subject was objected to by the unbelievers of that age, who put their objection in this form—"Why doth he then find fault? for who hath resisted his will?" Modern infidels finding this doctrine very clearly revealed in Scripture, and being satisfied in the exercise of their superior wisdom that the doctrine is irrational and absurd, have adduced it as an objection to the truth of the revelation which contains it. The generality of the defenders of Christianity in the early part of last century did not believe in this doctrine. They joined with the infidels in proclaiming its absurdity, and laboured to prove that it was not contained in Scripture, and that of course revelation was not responsible for it. The following extract from Leland upon this point is curious:—

"There are several invidious charges brought by one author against this excellent person (*i.e.* by Lord Bolingbroke against the apostle Paul). He is pleased to represent him as a loose declaimer, as a vain-glorious boaster, as having been guilty of great hypocrisy and dissimulation in his conduct towards the Jewish Christians, as writing obscurely and unintelligibly, and that where he is intelligible he is absurd, profane, and trifling. He particularly instances in his doctrine concerning predestination, though he owns that 'this doctrine is very much softened, and the assumed proceedings of God towards men are brought almost within the bounds of credibility by Mr Locke's exposition of the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans,' which he calls a forced one, but offers nothing to prove it so, and acknowledges that this sense might be admitted."¹

Now, observe what is exhibited here. Bolingbroke objects to Paul's doctrine of predestination as absurd and profane, and yet he is graciously pleased to allow that, as explained by Locke, the

¹ *View of Deistical Writers*, let. 31, p. 389.

doctrine is very much softened, and brought almost within the bounds of credibility. Locke held thoroughly unsound and erroneous views in regard to the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, and laboured to shew that Paul did not teach anything so absurd and profane as what is commonly understood by the doctrine of predestination. Bolingbroke was much satisfied by Locke's explanation, and so would most other infidels have been, though he had discernment enough to retain a lurking suspicion, which assuredly was well founded, that the explanation was a perversion of Paul's words; and then lastly, Leland was quite satisfied with Locke's explanation; and since Bolingbroke admitted that this explanation brought the doctrine almost within the bounds of credibility, he thought no farther answer necessary to Bolingbroke's original allegation that the doctrine of predestination, as it is commonly understood, and as it seems to be taught by Paul, is absurd and profane. This is a specimen of the way in which the doctrines of the gospel are dealt with by many of the defenders of the truth of Christianity. It had been much better, on many accounts, if the writers on the evidences had meddled less with the contents of revelation; but since you will find the doctrines of Christianity adverted to, more or less fully, and often grievously distorted and perverted, in books which it may be proper and even necessary for you to read, as being valuable and important works on the evidences, I think it right to warn you against paying much regard to what you may find there upon the subject of the doctrines of revelation, and to remind you again that many men have written ably, learnedly, and conclusively in support of the external evidence for the truth of Christianity, who are very unsafe guides in the interpretation of Scripture, and who entertained very erroneous views in regard to the substance of the revelation which God has made of his will to men.

I would observe, in the third place, that there is one important topic more closely connected with the subject of the evidences, with respect to which it is proper to warn you, that very defective and erroneous views are often found in books which treat of the truth of Christianity, I mean the inspiration of the sacred Scriptures. It is quite true, and I have repeatedly explained to you, that there is a distinction between the question of the truth of the Christian revelation and that of the divine authority and inspira-

tion of the books of Scripture, and that a regard to this distinction tends to facilitate a right arrangement and classification of the proofs. It is possible that the books of the New Testament might have been genuine and credible historical documents, affording abundant materials for establishing the divine mission of Christ, and might even have conveyed to us most important information concerning the nature of the revelation which he made to men, though no supernatural divine agency had been employed in the production of the books themselves, *i.e.* though they had not been themselves the word of God, dictated by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Arguments that may be sufficient to establish the divine mission of Jesus may not be adequate without some additional steps in the reasoning to prove the inspiration of the Scriptures; and objections which, when adduced against the inspiration of the Scriptures, may require to be discussed and disposed of, may yet have no bearing upon the general question of the truth of Christianity. All this is true, and upon these grounds there could be no reason for finding fault if men chose to write books which only established the truth of Christianity without professing to prove the inspiration of the Scriptures, adducing only those arguments which established the first, and omitting those which bore specially upon the second; answering those objections which were adduced against the divinity of Christ's mission, but setting aside as irrelevant those which, even if well founded, touched only the divinity of the Bible.

Many writers on the evidences, however, have not been contented with this, but have virtually denied the inspiration of the Scriptures; have not only deferred or put aside the consideration of objections against inspiration on the ground that they did not affect the general truth of Christianity, the only subject which they professed to be discussing, but have substantially admitted that, as objections to the inspiration of the Scriptures, these objections could not be answered. Bishop Watson, in his *Apology for the Bible*, has given up its inspiration as untenable. Paley, in discussing the objections founded upon erroneous opinions imputed to the apostles, has laid down the position, that while we are bound to believe that the conclusions of an apostle are true, we are under no obligation to admit the correctness or conclusiveness of the arguments, as recorded in Scripture, by which he may have estab-

lished them. Many other instances of a similar kind might be adduced. The inspiration of the Bible, which is a doctrine of Scripture, revealed and taught there, has been generally rejected, or very much explained away, by Socinian and Latitudinarian divines. They have very high ideas of the natural powers of men, of what they can do without special divine assistance, and are thus disposed to reckon the inspiration of the authors of the books of Scripture unnecessary. They do not like to be tied up to an implicit and absolute submission to whatever they find recorded in the pages of Scripture, but prefer to have some excuse for exercising their own judgment and employing their own reason, not merely in interpreting Scripture, or ascertaining the meaning of its statements, but in deciding how far its declarations are to be received. And thus they have been often led, even while defending the general truth of Christianity, to set aside wholly, or in a great measure, the divine authority of those Scriptures which were all given by inspiration of God, and which bear upon them so many plain traces of their divine original.

Let these considerations be kept in view, and they will tend, through God's blessing, to preserve you from danger, and to guide you aright in your investigation of the evidences, and in the study of the works which it may be necessary or expedient for you to peruse upon these subjects.



LECTURE XXI.

DIVINE ORIGIN AND AUTHORITY OF THE BOOKS OF SCRIPTURE—EXTERNAL EVIDENCE.

IN directing your attention to the evidences of Christianity we have generally spoken of the leading proposition to be established, as this, that Christ and his apostles were divinely commissioned teachers, authorised by God to make known his will to men. And it is evident that practically there is no ground for distinguishing between Christ and his apostles, so far as the authoritative communication of God's will to men is concerned, because we have just the very same evidence that Christ authorised the apostles to speak in his name, and required our submission to them in communicating instruction about religious matters, as we have that He himself was sent and commissioned by God, and claimed on that ground our reverence and obedience. It is right and necessary that we should ever cherish a deep sense of the vast, the immeasurable superiority of Jesus Christ above all beings, human or superhuman, whom God has ever employed to make known his will to men, above prophets and apostles, above Moses, and above angels, "for he hath been *made* as much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they"—*i.e.* he is just as much superior to the angels in official station as he is in the intrinsic dignity of his nature, as being the Son of God, of the same substance with the Father, and equal in power and glory. But in so far as concerns the truth and certainty of a revelation from God—and with this alone we have at present to do—the dignity of the messenger through whom the revelation is made is of no great practical importance; and if it be indeed true, as can be easily proved from Scripture, that

Christ has referred us to his apostles for fuller information as to the will of God, and has thereby in this respect virtually identified himself with them, then we are just as clearly and as certainly bound to receive as coming from God, and of course as entitled to our implicit submission, what they have revealed to us, as what he himself has made known.

Another general consideration to be kept in view is this, that when the great leading facts recorded in the New Testament, by which more directly the truth of Christ's divine commission is established, such as the miracles which Christ wrought, and his resurrection from the dead, are admitted as having been proved by satisfactory evidence, there can be no reason whatever why any other events recorded in the New Testament, even the most extraordinary and miraculous, should be denied or doubted, since they are all clearly connected together as parts of one complete and consistent narrative, and since they all rest upon substantially the same evidence. When convinced that Jesus was a teacher sent from God, we can have no doubt or hesitation about the apostles also working miracles, about the Holy Ghost descending upon them, about their speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance, about Paul's miraculous conversion and call to the apostleship, and about his being as fully authorised and qualified to reveal the will of God as those who had personally associated with Jesus during his life on earth.

In investigating the external evidences of the truth of Christianity, we consider the books of the New Testament merely as a collection of historical documents, containing at once the declarations of the parties, and the testimonies of the original witnesses, that we may judge whether the facts there recorded are true, and whether these facts establish the claims which they put forth. When we consider the internal evidences, we contemplate the books of the New Testament as containing a correct representation of the general system of doctrine and duty taught by Christ and his apostles, with the view of ascertaining whether in this system of doctrine and duty itself we can discover any indication that it was not devised or invented by men, and that it proceeded from God. To shew that we are warranted in regarding the books of the New Testament as containing a correct account of the general system of doctrine and duty taught by Christ and his

apostles, nothing more is necessary than to prove—first, that they were written by the apostles; and second, that they have been transmitted to us without any such alteration as to affect their substantial integrity; and this is done by the same evidence by which we prove their genuineness, by the quotations of them in a succession of subsequent authors, and by the substantial identity of all the MSS. and ancient versions of those books.

In virtue of the proof that has been adduced of the divine commission of Christ and his apostles, we are bound to receive as infallibly true whatever they have made known to us as the revealed will of God; to believe all the doctrines which they have delivered to us, and to submit implicitly to all the precepts which they have enjoined. They who heard them were called upon, on the ground of the proof adduced of their divine commission, to receive all their instructions as coming from God; and we, having conclusive proof of the divinity of their mission, are bound to be prepared to give their communications the same reception, and to proceed to investigate what means we have of ascertaining what God has revealed to us through them, and what is the will of God thus communicated to us. We have, in the books of the New Testament, a record of the instructions which they delivered, and everything which they taught concerning doctrine or duty, we are bound to receive as the word of God, as binding upon us by his supreme authority. God revealed it to them; he has given us abundant proof that he has done so; he has taken care to transmit to us authentic information concerning what they declared; and our duty now is to receive with implicit submission whatever can be proved to have proceeded from them. When our attention is directed to the way and the means by which this revelation has been conveyed to us, the source from which we obtain a knowledge of it, a very important question occurs, viz., Whether we are to regard and receive it as the word of God, not merely the substance of the information concerning doctrine and duty communicated by Christ and his apostles, and conveyed to us in the books of the New Testament, but the whole books themselves which compose that volume. That the books of the Old and New Testament not only contain and convey to us a revelation of God's will, but that they are themselves the Word of God, stamped throughout with divine authority, because produced through divine agency, has

been the general opinion of almost all who have been convinced of the truth and divine origin of the Christian revelation ; and to the grounds of this persuasion, the arguments by which it can be fully established, we are now called upon to advert. This question, as we have repeatedly had occasion to explain, is different from that which we have already discussed, and requires, in order to its decision, the introduction of some additional considerations, or rather a further extension and application of the points that have already been proved. If God were pleased to make a revelation of his will to men, it is indeed in the highest degree probable that he would take care that the revelation should be committed to writing, and transmitted in integrity, and not left to the uncertainties and contingencies of oral tradition ; and if so, he would no doubt secure that it should be correctly committed to writing for preservation and transmission, as well as that it should be correctly promulgated at first by those whom he might employ as his instruments in making it known to men ; but we could not assert with perfect confidence, and upon abstract grounds, *à priori*, that the writings in which this revelation might be preserved, and by which it might be transmitted, would contain nothing else but the revelation of God's will, and would be in all their parts traceable to his agency ; in other words, to apply this principle to the matter in hand, it would not at once follow, as a matter of course, that because the New Testament contained or embodied the revelation which God made to man through Christ and his apostles, and afforded us sufficient materials for ascertaining correctly what the substance of that revelation was, therefore all the books which compose the New Testament were themselves stamped throughout with divine authority, as being produced as we have them by God's agency. And consequently the question remains, Can it be proved that these books, as they stand, and not merely the substance of the doctrines they contain, are the word of God, stamped with divine authority ? And if so, how can this be established ?

As, in considering this question, we must include not merely the books of the New Testament, but the whole Bible, we must first briefly advert to the grounds upon which we believe in the divine origin of the Mosaic economy, and the divine mission of the prophets whose predictions form so large a portion of

the Old Testament. And the first question here, as in the case of the truth of Christianity, is not about the divine authority of the books which compose the Old Testament, but about the truth of the divine mission of Moses, and the reality of the divine inspiration of the succession of prophets in the subsequent periods of the Jewish history. We do not mean to discuss the subject at any length, but merely to advert to its general nature and place in connection with the other departments of the evidence of the truth of our religion.

The genuineness and general authenticity of the books of the Old Testament may be established independently of the explicit and conclusive testimony borne to them by Christ and his apostles, upon grounds similar to those by which we establish the genuineness and general authenticity of those of the New. And to the truth and reality of those miraculous events by which Moses professed to establish his divine commission, we have the attestation of the Jewish nation in submitting to his authority, and receiving his laws and institutions, upon the ground of the evidence afforded by these miracles that they came from God—an attestation which may be said to have been repeated by every successive generation of Jews from the time of Moses down to the present day. Thus the divine commission of Moses is established; and that there was in the Jewish nation a succession of prophets who received direct communications from God is established by the predictions which it can be proved they delivered, and which were remarkably fulfilled in the history of the Jews, and of the other nations with which they were more or less nearly connected. Thus the divine commission of Moses and the prophets may be established even independently of the attestation given to it by Christ and his apostles. It is not necessary, however, to have recourse to such a line of argument upon this topic; for having once established the divine mission of Christ and his apostles, and being on this ground warranted and bound to believe whatever they have declared, we have of course, in their frequent and unequivocal attestations to the divine mission of Moses and the prophets, abundant reason to believe that God at sundry times and in divers manners revealed his will to men by their instrumentality. The attestation of Christ and his apostles to the

divine mission of Moses and the prophets we shall have occasion to explain more fully afterwards when we come to consider the inspiration and canonicity of the Bible, for it proves not only that God commissioned Moses and the prophets to reveal his will to men, but also moreover that the books of the Old Testament were given by divine inspiration, and are possessed of divine authority. It is enough at present to advert generally to the way and manner in which it may be proved that, as God made known his will to men by Christ and his apostles, he did so also by Moses and the prophets. In turning from the proof of the general truth of Christianity, or of the proposition that Christ and his apostles were commissioned by God to reveal his will to men, to the consideration of the origin and character of the books in which this revelation is conveyed to us, we have to distinguish between the divine origin and authority of these books, and their inspiration by the Holy Ghost. It is indeed true that the inspiration of the books of Scripture is often, perhaps generally, used in so wide a sense as to comprehend the whole subject of God's connection with the composition of the books, or the whole of his agency in the production of them, as distinguished from his connection with the substance of the revelation they contain; and there is certainly no impropriety in such a use or application of the word. But we think it may conduce to a more distinct exposition of the whole subject, and a better classification of the proofs, if we advert in the first place to the divine origin and authority of the books of Scripture in general, or to the evidence we have of the general position, that God's agency and authority were interposed in the production of the books themselves, and not merely in communicating the substance of the revelation they contain; so that the books themselves as they stand, and not merely the general system of doctrine and duty which they unfold, may be fairly and truly called the word of God; and then, after establishing this, proceed to consider, under the head of *inspiration*, the less essential though still important question as to the way and manner in which the agency of God was interposed in the production of these books, or what is usually discussed under the head of the nature and extent of inspiration; and this will be naturally followed by the consideration of the subject of the canon, or the investigation of the questions connected with the determination

of what the books *are* to which this divine authority and inspiration are to be ascribed. These explanations will, I trust, enable you to understand distinctly the connection and conditions of the argument, and to see *where we are* and *what we mean* when we proceed to advert to the way and manner of proving the divine authority of the books which compose the New Testament.

The divine authority of the books of the New Testament may be proved, like the divine origin of Christianity, by evidence external, internal, and experimental; and these divisions of the evidence are analogous in their general nature and character in both cases. The external evidence is that derived from what we know concerning the authors, and the facts connected with the composition of the books; the internal from the character and contents of the books themselves; and the experimental from the effects which these books have produced, and are still producing.

The distinction that has been sometimes made between the evidence derived from places without the Bible, and that derived from places within the Bible (Chalmers, vol. ii. p. 8) is just as useless here as we shewed it to you to be under the former head, and serves only to introduce confusion. There is a clear distinction between the evidence derived from what we can know concerning the men by whom, and the circumstances in which, the books were composed, and that derived from the actual contents or substance of the books themselves; but under the former of these heads, which constitutes the external evidence of the divine authority of the books, we must of necessity include all that we know certainly concerning the history of the authors and the composition of the books, *whether derived from the statements of the books themselves, or from any other authentic source whatever*. Having proved the divine commission of Christ and his apostles, we are now to regard them, not merely as honest men and credible narrators of history, but as infallible authorities in all the statements they make concerning religious subjects, and to believe implicitly whatever information they may convey to us concerning the books of Scripture, or any other topic whatever in regard to which they advance a claim to our submission.

In considering the external evidence of the divine authority of the books of the New Testament, one of the first and most obvious considerations that occurs to us is, that those books were

chiefly composed by the apostles themselves, by the very men who were employed by God to reveal to us the system of doctrine and duty which is unfolded in these books. They are not accounts of what was said and done by Christ and his apostles, preserved and transmitted to us by other parties. They are the accounts of the life and discourses of Christ, and of the labours and instructions of the apostles, recorded and transmitted to us by the apostles themselves. The authors of these books were the only men whom God employed to reveal his will, and whom for that purpose he furnished with abundant communications of his Spirit. When *these* men explained the system of Christianity to the people whom they orally addressed, or when they defended their cause and their persons before judicial tribunals, we know that they enjoyed the special presence and assistance of God, the guidance and direction of the Holy Ghost; and we cannot suppose that they were left destitute of the same guidance and direction when they sat down to commit to writing, for the permanent instruction of mankind, the history of the life and discourses of their Master, or when they addressed letters of advice and direction to the churches which had been formed through the success of their oral instructions. It is by the Gospels and the Epistles which they wrote, and by them alone, that the Christian revelation has been transmitted to subsequent ages; and if they had the constant presence and guidance of the Holy Ghost in their personal ministry in proclaiming the truth, in defending themselves against adversaries, and in establishing and organising churches, there can be no reason to doubt, and there is the strongest reason on this ground alone to believe, that they had the same guidance and direction in their writings; and that as God was the author of the revelation which they communicated, so he is to be regarded as the author and source of those writings which were directed to no other object than just to unfold that revelation, and to afford instructions as to the way and manner in which it is to be applied and brought into operation in order that it may produce its intended effects. This point might be illustrated at length, but it is unnecessary. The argument is clear and satisfactory. What such men as the apostles were—men who were endowed with the power of working miracles and of predicting future events—men who were commissioned by God to make known his will, and who

in all their official labours were under the immediate guidance and direction of the Holy Ghost—wrote, and wrote in such circumstances and for such purposes, must have been written under the guidance and direction of the Spirit of Truth, and is therefore stamped throughout with divine authority ; and accordingly almost all who have professed to believe in the truth of the Christian religion have admitted the divine authority of the books which compose the New Testament, though differing in some questions concerning the nature and extent of inspiration ; except Socinians and German rationalists, who have manifestly been influenced by a desire and determination to maintain the supremacy of their own reason, to emancipate themselves from the control of the sacred Scriptures, and to retain the liberty of judging according to their own discretion as to what in the Bible comes from God, and was intended to be of permanent use and obligation, and what, though found in the Scriptures, is possessed of no such binding authority. This is the principal argument under the head of external evidence for the divine authority of the books which compose the New Testament ; and it is sufficient of itself to establish it.

The external evidence however comprehends every argument derived, not only from what we know concerning the authors of these books, but also concerning the circumstances and the objects of their composition ; and any information we may possess concerning these points, although derived from the statements of the books themselves, comes properly under the head of external evidence, because it applies to the historical matter of fact, as to the source from which these books really proceeded, and forms no part of the indications of a divine origin which the books themselves as such contain. We have not a great deal of direct and explicit information concerning these points in the books of the New Testament itself ; still there are statements which afford decided confirmations of the evidence of its divine origin and authority. The statement, for instance, with which Luke commences his Gospel, viz., “ It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed,” seems fairly to imply that whatever authority might attach to any information which Luke in his Gospel has communicated to us,

attaches equally to the whole of it, *i.e.* to the writing or book as such. John tells us (xx. 31) that his Gospel was written "that men might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing they might have life through his name," a statement which thoroughly identifies the object of his writing, and of course of the whole of what is contained in his Gospel, with that of his preaching; and thus affords at least the strongest presumption that in writing his Gospel he had the same divine guidance and direction as in executing his apostolic commission of proclaiming orally God's will to men. We find the apostles, in their epistles to the churches, claiming for their writings the same divine origin, the same supernatural and infallible authority, as they claimed for their oral instructions, though this is not frequently and formally insisted upon, because the truth of it was really too evident to require proof. It was enough that these writings came from the inspired apostles who were commissioned by God to make known his will, and who had fully established by miracles, which Paul calls the signs of an apostle, their divine commission. Paul may be regarded as plainly enough claiming for his epistles a divine origin and infallible authority, when he commenced them, as he usually did, by assuming the designation of an apostle, and referring to his warrant and authority for assuming that designation, and executing the functions of that office, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God" (Rom. i. 1). His apostolic authority being thus set forth in the commencement of his epistles as the ground or basis of the divine authority of what he was about to write, we have just the same reason for receiving as coming from God, and as stamped with *his* authority whatever we find in these epistles, as his hearers had for receiving as divinely inspired, in virtue of Christ's promises and the Spirit's communications, whatever he delivered to them in his oral instructions. His authority and commission being thus set forth in the commencement of his epistles to the churches as the basis of their obligation to receive them as coming from God, it was not necessary thereafter in the course of the epistles to insist upon this, to say anything more about the true source from which they proceeded, or the authority with which they were invested. The allusions therefore to this matter are only incidental, but quite sufficient to afford decided

proofs of the divine authority of the apostolic writings. We may refer to some of these : " If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual (*i.e.* if any man lay claim to peculiar spiritual gifts, or to supernatural divine communications), let him acknowledge that the things that I *write* unto you are the commandments of the Lord " (1 Cor. xiv. 37, 38) ; " Let such an one think that such as we are in word by letters, such also are we indeed when we are present," (2 Cor. x. 11), where he manifestly claims the same authority and reverence for his letters as for his oral instructions. And again : " If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him " (2 Thess. iii. 14).

We have not in the New Testament any direct and formal declaration as to the divine origin and authority of the books of the New Testament as a whole ; and this was not to be expected in the circumstances, when the different books of which it is composed had not been collected into a volume. But we have, both from our Lord and his apostles, the fullest and most explicit attestations to the divine origin and authority of the Old Testament as then and always received by the Jews. We have this attestation embodied both in general declarations and in many specific statements, conclusively establishing, by whatever authority attaches to any declaration of Christ and his apostles, not only that Moses was a divine messenger employed by God to reveal his will, and that the prophets spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, but also moreover that the books which compose the Old Testament were to be traced to God as their author, and were stamped throughout with his divine and infallible authority. Some of these attestations given by Christ and his apostles to the Old Testament it will be necessary for us to examine more carefully ; but as we are persuaded that they establish, not only the divine commission of Moses and the prophets, not only the divine authority of the books of the Old Testament in a general sense, which is the point we are at present considering, but also their plenary and verbal inspiration, we shall defer the consideration of them till we come to the investigation of that question. Before leaving this subject of the information to be gathered from the New Testament concerning the divine origin of the books which compose it as a matter of historical fact, it is proper to advert to the attestation given by the Apostle Peter to the divine origin and authority of the epistles

of Paul, and we introduce it here, after rather than before the reference to the attestation given by our Lord and his apostles to the divine origin and authority of the Old Testament, because part of the force of Peter's attestation to the authority of Paul's epistles lies in his putting them on the same level in point of authority with the Scriptures of the Old Testament. It is found in 2 Pet. iii. 15, 16: "Even as our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction."

We have said that the external evidence for the divine authority of the books of the New Testament is based upon the information we possess concerning the authors of these books, and the circumstances connected with their origin and composition considered as matters of historical fact, whether derived from the books themselves, or from any other authentic source; and we have information of an authentic kind from other sources which goes to confirm our conviction of their origin and authority.

We have several statements contained in the writings of the Fathers, the truth of which there is no reason to doubt, which may be reckoned as equally credible with any other historical testimony to a matter of fact, and which go to prove that the apostles regarded, and that their followers received their writings as invested with the same divine and infallible authority as their oral instructions. Irenæus (book iii. chap. i.) tells us that what the apostles first preached, they afterwards wrote in the Scriptures. Eusebius tells us (lib. iii. chap. xxiv.) that Matthew having first preached to the Hebrews, *i.e.* the Jews, and being about to go to other nations, wrote his Gospel, supplying by writing the want of his presence and oral instructions. Eusebius further informs us that the Apostle John examined and sanctioned the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and wrote his own chiefly to supply some important additional materials which they had not been led to record. And indeed we have the unanimous testimony of the primitive church, from the apostles downwards, to the divine origin of the books of the New Testament. If you have examined with care and attention, as you ought to have done, the testimonies of the early Chris-

tian writers, by which we commonly establish the genuineness and authenticity of the books of the New Testament, you must have seen that many of them declare the conviction of their authors that those books came from God, and were given by divine inspiration. And this may be regarded, not merely as the statement of an opinion which the primitive church entertained upon grounds of the validity of which she was satisfied, but as practically and substantially an attestation to a matter of fact, namely this, that the apostles who were the authors of those books, gave them forth to the churches and to their followers as having been composed in the execution of their apostolic commission, under the guidance and direction of the Holy Ghost, and as therefore possessed of divine and infallible authority. And this consideration is sufficient, were there no other, to warrant the declaration contained in the first chapter of our Confession of Faith, viz., "We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to an high and reverend¹ esteem of the Holy Scripture," inasmuch as in various ways the testimony of the church, or the reception these books have met with ever since they were first promulgated, does tend greatly, upon the most rational grounds, and without giving to the church's testimony more weight than that to which upon scriptural and Protestant principles it is reasonably entitled, to confirm our conviction that these books were given by inspiration of God, and are able to make us wise unto salvation.

¹ That is, "reverent."—Ed.



LECTURE XXII.

INTERNAL EVIDENCE, IN COMMENTARY UPON CONFESSION, CHAP. I. SEC. 5.

WE have given a brief sketch of the external evidence of the divine origin and authority of the sacred scriptures, the divine origin and authority of the books which compose the Bible, as distinguished, on the one hand, from the divine origin of the substance and leading features of the revelation which they contain and convey ; and, on the other, from the question of the way and manner in which divine agency was exerted in producing them, or the nature and extent of inspiration. We shewed you that, from what we know as matter of undoubted historical fact concerning the authors of the books of the New Testament, and of the circumstances in which, and the objects for which, they were composed, the conclusion is certain and irresistible, that the apostles, in their writings as well as in their oral instructions, were guided and directed by the Holy Ghost, and that therefore their writings *are* the word of God, possessed of divine and infallible authority ; while the attestation of Christ and his apostles, viewing them as divinely accredited messengers, establishes beyond doubt the divine origin and authority of the books which compose the Old Testament. The internal evidence for the divine origin and authority of the books of Scripture is that which is derived from an examination of the character and contents of the books themselves ; and in explaining briefly the general nature and bearing of the arguments classed under this head, and derived from this source, we cannot do better than follow the guidance of that section in the first chapter of our Confession of Faith, to which in last lecture we had occasion to refer. It stands thus :—

“We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture ; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God” (Sec. 5).

The first thing mentioned here, viz., “the testimony of the church,” belongs to the head of the external evidence, and as such was adverted to in last lecture. The rest belong chiefly to the internal, though some of them might also, with equal propriety, be classed under the head of the experimental evidence. We shall briefly explain each of them singly, and then advert to the general conclusion that all these things “are arguments whereby the Scripture doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God.”

The first is, “the heavenliness of the matter.” The matter of the Scriptures, or the various subjects there treated of, have all a reference, more or less direct, to things celestial and divine. They are connected throughout with God, the unseen world, and the eternal destinies of man. No merely human or temporal object seems to be aimed at or attended to. Everything is connected, more or less directly and palpably, with Him whose throne is in the heavens ; with the celestial origin and dignity of his intelligent creatures ; with their relations to heaven ; and with the end and the means of restoring to heaven those who had forfeited their birthright. Everything connected with this world is represented in the aspect in which it is seen from heaven, and in the light of a higher world. There is nothing that is of the earth earthy. All breathes of heaven, and tends to lead the thoughts and desires to things unseen and eternal. The guilt and depravity of men are indeed set forth in glowing colours, and exhibited in fearful specimens of what man is and has done. But it is held forth as rebellion against the God of heaven. It is represented in the light in which it usually appears, not so much to men themselves as to the purer inhabitants of a higher and a holier region ; and it is unfolded for the purpose of shewing men what they have lost, and what difficulties stand in the way of their restoration to heaven and happiness, and in order to lead them to turn their thoughts to that state where there is no more sin and no more

sorrow. The Bible indeed shews that God has been pleased to make revelations of his will, conveying regulations about temporal and earthly things, especially in connection with that remarkable people whom he selected to put his name in them. And many of these regulations, though in some respects intended to serve temporary purposes, and not now fitted to effect all the same ends as they once did for a season, are recorded in the same Scriptures, and form a part of the word of God. But even these things were all written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the world have come; they were all fitted and intended to have some reference to the heavenly as well as the earthly Canaan; and they are still found, under the guidance of God's Spirit, to minister instruction that is profitable for guiding and directing men in their journey to the Jerusalem that is above. Such books, containing such matter, and so free from everything that indicates an earthly origin, must have come from God.

The second consideration is "the efficacy of the doctrine." This topic may be regarded as belonging partly to the head of the experimental evidence; for the efficacy of the doctrine comes out most fully and most palpably when exhibited in its actual effects upon men individually and collectively, upon their understandings, motives, character, and conduct; and can be fully understood and appreciated only by those who have experienced it. Still something of the efficacy of the doctrines by which the Scriptures are pervaded, or of their fitness to effect and impress the minds and characters of men in a degree immeasurably superior to any other doctrines or truths that ever have been set before them, may be discerned even by those who have not yet submitted their hearts and lives to its influence, so as to afford even to them some rational ground for the conviction that it came from God, and that the books which it pervades must be traced to his agency. The whole of the doctrines by which the sacred Scriptures are pervaded concerning God, his character, government, and ways; concerning man, his condition, danger, capacities, duties, and prospects; concerning the way of salvation through Christ in all its branches and arrangements; and concerning the everlasting destinies of the human race, is manifestly fitted, in its own nature, when viewed in connection with the actual constitution of man, to exert the most potent influence

upon the character and conduct of men. So that men to whom it has been made known, but whose character has not been changed by it, and who are not under its influence increasing in righteousness and holiness, may be fairly said to have never yet believed it. We know indeed that men will never experience its efficacy except through the operation of the Holy Ghost; but this as a matter of fact is traceable solely to the ungodliness and depravity that has been superinduced upon human nature by the fall, and the fact does not affect the question of the fitness and tendency of the doctrines themselves in their own nature to produce the most powerful and the most salutary effects upon the minds and hearts of men, so as to make them suitable instruments of a divine agency, and to afford plain indications that they came from Him who knows the heart of man, and turneth it whithersoever he will; who is the author and the guardian of all holiness throughout the universe. This is the light in which the efficacy of the doctrine may be presented to men who have not themselves submitted to its influence; but when we further attend to the voice of experience as exhibited in the case of those who have been born again of this word, and are now taking it as a light to their feet, we find that not they only, but any to whom their experience and spiritual history may be made known, have good ground to believe that the efficacy of the doctrine is often manifested, not merely in the great leading truths which compose the Christian system, as ascertained from various portions of the Bible, but in single particular statements of Scripture brought home with power to the understanding and the heart, and producing deep and striking impressions of divine things, calling forth conviction of sin, leading men to turn from it unto God, filling them with love to God and Christ, animating them with zeal and ardour, and filling them with strong consolation and good hope through grace; thus plainly pointing, not merely to the general truths or doctrines taught in the Bible, but to its precise and particular statements, as having come from God, and as still employed by him for accomplishing his gracious and saving purposes.

We need not dwell upon the next particular mentioned as an argument for the divine authority of the Scriptures, viz., "the majesty of the style," as it could be illustrated only by producing

examples of sublimity, dignity, beauty, and authority in extracts from the Bible, which you can easily find for yourselves, and as, when such specimens are produced, the argument founded upon them just consists of an appeal to the ordinary sentiments and feelings of mankind, and to the impressions which they receive. It ought to be remarked, however, that there are some general characters or qualities attaching more or less to the whole Bible which may be comprehended under the general head of style, or the principles which have regulated or determined the way and manner in which it has been composed, that may be fairly regarded as affording no inconsiderable evidence that it proceeded from one source, and that this source was at least superhuman.

The next argument is "the consent of all the parts," and this, when rightly estimated and fully drawn out, affords a very strong proof of the divine origin and authority of the Bible. The Bible, it is to be remembered, consists of a great number of distinct books, produced by a great variety of authors, who lived in different ages, extending over a period of about 1600 years, *i.e.* from Moses to John, and placed in a very great variety of external circumstances, but all of them treating more or less of subjects which were in some respects identical. Yet in all these different books, and among all these different authors, we find the most perfect harmony in all the views they entertained, in all the truths they promulgated, in the motives by which they were animated, in the objects they aimed at, and in the kind of means they employed for attaining their ends. And we find pervading the whole of those books, from first to last, not merely a perfect harmony of doctrine, sentiment, and object, but we can trace plainly one great scheme, one grand comprehensive economy, originating in one cause, directed to one object, partially and gradually developed, and at length fully unfolded and consummated. The authors of the different books of Scripture take naturally and obviously the position and aspect of men who were raised up and guided by a superior power, employed as his instruments for effecting his purposes, accomplishing for the time just the object which he had in view, their personal labours and their written productions being designed by him to serve purposes of which they themselves were not fully aware, but which we now see to have been closely and intimately con-

nected with the attainment of one great object, with the completion of one great and glorious scheme. This consent of all the parts, this wonderful harmony that pervades the whole of the sacred Scriptures, may be fairly regarded as a proof that one agency was concerned in the production of them all, and that that was the agency of Him who seeth the end in the beginning, with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The unity, the harmony which we find, as a matter of fact, to pervade the whole Bible from beginning to end, could not have existed—must be regarded as an impossibility—had the books which compose it been the productions of unassisted men, had not the composition of them been superintended, directed, and controlled by one comprehensive mind ; in short, had not God's agency been so interposed in the production and composition of them as to make them really the word of God.

Contradictions and inconsistencies have indeed been alleged to exist in the sacred Scriptures, and these have been often adduced and urged, not only by infidels, but even by men who, while professing to believe in the truth of the Christian revelation, have refused to admit the divine origin and authority of the books which compose the Bible. Most of these alleged contradictions and inconsistencies originate in ignorance, carelessness, and prejudice on the part of those who adduce them, and admit of being easily explained or reconciled. If there are any that do not very readily admit of a precise and specific solution individually, there are general considerations, applicable more or less to all ancient books, which afford a sufficient answer to any objections that might be founded on circumstances of this sort. Besides, the alleged inconsistencies and contradictions, especially those of them about which there is any real difficulty in giving a specific solution, respect only very insignificant matters, such as names and numbers, and therefore, even if they did affect the question of the plenary verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, a point to be afterwards considered, cannot affect that great truth which the consent of all the parts, the unity and harmony pervading all the books of Scripture, notwithstanding their having been composed by so many different men in different ages and circumstances, establishes, viz., that they were all composed under the superintendence and direction of one comprehensive mind ; in other words, that God's agency

was so exerted in the production of them, that they are all his word, possessed of divine authority.

The next topic is "the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God." The great truth taught in Scripture that God does everything for his own glory, for the manifestation of his own perfections, can be easily shewn to be in entire conformity with the dictates of right reason; and indeed when men have been led to form any right conceptions of the being whom we designate as God, a being infinitely glorious and excellent, independent, self-existent, self-sufficient, the creator, proprietor, and governor of all things, they are naturally and irresistibly led to deduce from this idea the conclusion that such a being could not be moved or induced to act by a regard to anything *out of himself*, or irrespective of himself. In all his works of creation and providence there is a supreme regard to his own glory, the manifestation of his own perfections. If the Bible be his word, proceeding from him, and stamped with his authority, we might expect it to possess the same character, and to be directed to the same end. And so it is. "The scope of the whole is to give all glory to God." The whole of the sacred Scriptures is manifestly directed to the object of making God known as he is; of unfolding his character, plans, and government; of leading men to entertain the most exalted conceptions of his excellencies, of the worship and homage that are due to him, of their entire dependence on him, of their unworthiness of all his mercies, and of their obligations to shew forth his praise.

These are objects which men, such as they have usually exhibited themselves in their actions and in their writings, would not have aimed at at all, or in any eminent degree, and which even the best and holiest men whom the world has seen, made so by the power and grace of God himself, would not have prosecuted so singly, so supremely, and so unceasingly as we find is done by the authors of the books of Scripture, unless God himself had animated and directed them. To give all glory to God would not have been so thoroughly and so exclusively the scope of the Bible unless the Bible had been God's own work, unless its various parts had been produced under the immediate superintendence and direction of Him who made all things for himself, and who will not give his glory to another.

The last argument under this head for the divine origin and authority of the Bible is "the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation." It is true, not only that the Bible makes a full discovery of the only way of man's salvation, and that no other book, except among those which are professedly taken from the Bible, does or even professes to do so, but moreover that the great object of the whole Bible is more or less directly to open up and unfold the scheme of salvation, and that every part of the Bible bears more or less upon this object, and is fitted to contribute to this end. This scheme could not have been invented or devised by men. We can see in it plain traces of the wisdom of God, of its adaptation to man's condition, constitution, necessities, and aspirations; and when we find that the Bible is devoted to the development of it, and that the whole of it bears more or less directly upon the great object of unfolding and applying it, of shewing men that they need it, and of directing them as to the way in which they may obtain the benefit of it, we have the strongest ground to believe that the book itself, or rather the collection of books that form the sacred Scriptures, came from Him who alone could devise, execute, and reveal such a scheme.

The Confession adds, "the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof." These things have been illustrated by many writers, and will be seen and felt by all who set themselves to study the Scriptures in a right frame of spirit, and under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, given in answer to prayer. And the excellencies of the sacred Scriptures, the indications of its self-evidencing power, you should all make it your desire and your object, while you study the Bible, to perceive and appreciate.

These are the chief topics which may be said to constitute the internal evidence for the divine origin and authority of the sacred Scriptures, or to afford some proof of the general position that God's agency was exerted, not only in the communication of the substance of the revelation, but in the production of the books. All these various considerations bear upon the proof of the general truth of the Mosaic and Christian revelations. Some of them bear perhaps more precisely and directly upon that question than upon the divine origin and authority of all the books of which the Bible is composed; and some of them do not admit of being brought out

in all their strength for the conviction of infidels and gainsayers, but can be fully estimated and appreciated only by those whose eyes have been opened by the Spirit to see the wondrous things contained in God's law, who have received the truth in the love of it, and submitted their hearts to its influence. But they all involve considerations which do bear more or less clearly and directly upon the divine origin and authority of the Bible, as distinguished from the divine origin and authority of the Mosaic and Christian revelations in general. And they all admit of being made more or less intelligible even to unbelievers, and may be presented in such aspects as should in right reason contribute, upon perfectly rational grounds, to produce the conviction and the admission that the books which compose the Bible were not the work of unassisted men, and that the agency of God was exerted in the production of them, so that the sacred Scriptures may be called the word of God, and should be received and submitted to as stamped with his authority. They are all found in the Bible itself; they may be seen and discerned there by any who will examine it aright, with a real desire to know whether it be indeed the word of God; and hence the truth and justness of the statement in the Confession, that all these things "are arguments whereby the Holy Scripture doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God," qualities or properties found in it, upon due examination, which afford reasonable and conclusive grounds for the conviction that, to use the well-known and often quoted words of Locke, "it has God for its author, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter, as well as salvation for its end." The remaining portion of this section of the Confession of Faith,—which is in these words, and contains a great and important truth, viz., "yet notwithstanding our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts,"—will be afterwards explained and illustrated.

It cannot be said with truth that every portion of the Bible contains equally clear and palpable internal marks of its divine origin. It cannot be doubted that some portions of the Bible contain clearer and plainer traces of God's presence and agency in the production of them than others, the word of God being analogous in this respect to his works of creation and providence.

Neither are we prepared to say of every particular book in the Bible, taken singly and separately, that it contains internal proofs of its divine origin and authority, such as could be brought out under any of the general heads to which we have now adverted under the department of the internal evidence, and exhibited plainly and palpably for the conviction of gainsayers. We are disposed to concur in a statement made by Richard Baxter, whose views generally upon the subject of the evidences we formerly had occasion specially to commend to you, and which is quoted with approbation by Dr Chalmers in a portion of our text-book, which we will by-and-by have occasion to consider:—

“For my part, I confess, I could never boast of any such testimony or light of the Spirit (nor reason neither) which, without human testimony, would have made me believe that the book of Canticles is canonical, and written by Solomon, and the book of Wisdom apocryphal, and written by Philo, &c. Nor would I have known all, or any historical books, such as Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, &c., to be written by divine inspiration, but by tradition,” &c. (vol. ii. pp. 405, 406).

But whatever may be the extent to which, from internal evidence alone, we can establish against gainsayers the divine origin and authority of all the different books or portions of Scripture, certain it is, from the experience of all in every age, who have made the attempt, that the more men study the Bible with diligence and humility, and with prayer for the divine blessing and guidance, the more clearly will they see through it all the traces of God’s presence and agency, the more fully will they experience its self-evidencing power, and the more thoroughly will they be persuaded by what they see and feel, as well as by submission to the authority of God clearly revealing this truth by his apostle, that it is all given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness. Believers are liable to be assailed by temptations to error as well as to sin, and they are not always exempted from occasional temptations even to the fatal error of infidelity. And they are commonly enabled to resist these temptations, and to hold fast their profession, through the Spirit opening up to them more fully, and impressing upon them more deeply, what they may have previously seen of the self-evidencing power of the Bible, and what

they may have formerly noticed of the efficacy of its doctrines and statements upon themselves, in changing their natures, in enlightening their understandings, in sanctifying their hearts, and in regulating their conduct. Thus they are persuaded that the Bible could not possibly have been a cunningly devised fable, that it must have come from God, and that it is only by cleaving to it as a light unto their feet, and a lamp unto their path, that they can be guided in the way everlasting.

We must remind you, however, that the evidence for the divine origin and authority of the Bible, like that for the truth of the Christian revelation in general, is cumulative in its character, derived from a variety of sources which ought all to be carefully examined, consisting of a variety of branches which ought to be all surveyed, and that all the different proofs, external and internal, which have been brought forward upon this subject, and which really possess any argumentative weight, ought to be viewed in their connection with each other, and in their united bearing upon the conclusion to be established. It is deserving of notice that that portion of the sacred Scriptures which might probably be regarded as having less self-evidencing power, less internal evidence in its own character and contents of its divine origin and authority, has the clearest and most explicit external testimony. There are many portions of the Old Testament which have just as clear internal evidence of their divine original as the books of the New; but this could not be said of the whole of it, of all the books of which it is composed. But then we have the clear and explicit testimony of our Lord and his apostles, assumed of course to have been already proved to be divinely commissioned teachers authorised to reveal God's will, that the Old Testament is the word of God, and is stamped throughout with divine authority. And this testimony is so clear and explicit, it is given so fully and unequivocally, both in general declarations and in specific statements, which imply or assume it, that there is no possibility of evading it except by adopting the principle of the infidel rationalists of Germany, that on this, and on many other occasions, Christ and his apostles stated or admitted, not what they themselves believed, or wished others to believe, but merely what was in accordance with and accommodated to the superstitious and erroneous notions that then generally prevailed among the Jews. And men who take

this ground are of course to be regarded and treated as infidels, with whom, when we are called upon to have any discussion with them, we must go back to the first principles of the whole subject of the evidences, and whom we must, in the first place, endeavour to convince by appropriate arguments that Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved of God, by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him; and that to the apostles whom he sent forth God bore witness with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will (Acts ii. 22; Heb. ii. 4).



LECTURE XXIII.

DIFFERENT DOCTRINES AS TO THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE
SCRIPTURES, OR THE AMOUNT OF DIVINE AGENCY IN
THE PRODUCTION OF THEM—PRINCIPAL AUTHORS.

IN introducing the subject of the divine origin and authority of the sacred Scriptures, we explained to you that by these words we meant to describe in general the truth that God's agency was exerted in the production of the books which compose the Bible, and not merely in communicating the substance of the revelations which are there contained ; reserving the more detailed and exact investigation of the question as to the way and manner in which God's agency was exerted in the production of these books to be prosecuted under the head of the nature and extent of inspiration. It must be admitted that, as thus explained, the doctrine of the divine origin and authority of the Bible is somewhat vague and indefinite in its import. A very considerable number of writers, who differ in opinion to no small extent from each other, must be all in this sense regarded as holding the divine origin and authority of the Bible. We do not well see, however, how this vagueness and generality can be avoided. There is a clear line of distinction between those who merely admit the divine origin and authority of the Mosaic and Christian revelations, and those who, in addition to this, maintain that God was concerned in, and in some way directed and superintended, the production of the books which compose the Bible. And again, there is a clear line of distinction between those who rest satisfied with the general doctrine of the divine origin and authority of the books, though differing materially among themselves as to the character and extent of God's agency in the

matter, and as to the perfection of the writings which resulted from it, and those who hold fully and precisely the great truth of the plenary and verbal inspiration of the whole Scriptures. These are the only very clear and palpable lines of division upon this subject which can be distinctly laid down and described. But as the intermediate class, who hold in a general sense the divine origin and authority of the Bible, without admitting its plenary verbal inspiration, is composed of men whose views differ materially from each other, it may be proper, before proceeding further, to advert somewhat to these differences, and the grounds on which they rest. The view commonly held by Socinians upon this subject, and indeed by Latitudinarian divines in general, by those who have been characterised by their lax and erroneous views of the great doctrines of the gospel, is this, that though Moses and Christ were commissioned by God to make known his will to men, and though we have in the Bible, and God intended that we should have, sufficient materials for ascertaining the substance of the information which he communicated to men through their instrumentality, yet that the books themselves, which compose the Bible, were the productions of 'men who enjoyed no peculiar divine assistance or direction, and who, though they were honest and faithful narrators, and have given us accounts which may in the main be received as true and correct, yet were liable to err, and did err, and are not therefore to be implicitly followed. This is the common Socinian or Unitarian view; and this is what is meant when it is said, and said truly, that Socinians deny altogether the inspiration of the Scriptures. Upon this theory the Scriptures are really deprived of the character commonly ascribed to them, not only of being a revelation from God, but even of being fully adapted to convey to us an authentic representation of the revelations he has given to men. We have strong grounds to believe that if God was pleased to communicate to men a revelation intended for the permanent benefit of the human race, he would make provision for securing that it should be correctly embodied and transmitted among men; and yet, according to this view, which denies in any sense the inspiration of the Scriptures, no effectual provision has been made for securing this end. This however, so far from being a defect in the estimation of Socinians, is just what

recommends the notion to their favour and adoption, as it leaves them at liberty to exercise their own reason at discretion upon the statements of Scripture, and practically to believe as much or as little of it as they think proper, a liberty in which they have always shewn that they are very ready to indulge. This view is of course rejected by all who hold *in any sense* the divine origin and authority of the Bible. They, upon the grounds of which a sketch has been given in the last two lectures, maintain that God not only communicated his will to men, but made effectual provision for securing that his revelation should be correctly embodied in the Bible, and that he so guided and superintended the production of the books of Scripture as that they are His word, stamped with his authority.

Under this general position, however, there is, as we have said, some diversity of sentiment even among those who stop short of the truth of the plenary and verbal inspiration of the whole Scriptures. Some, while they cannot be said to deny inspiration altogether, and while they admit that God's immediate agency was concerned in the production of the books of Scripture, seem anxious to have as little of inspiration or of divine agency in the matter as possible, and are disposed to maintain what is really little better than the Socinian view, viz., that inspiration or divine agency applies only to those parts of the Bible in which something is communicated that could not, without immediate revelation, have been known by men at all, or which contain predictions of future events; and that in the composition of the other portions of Scripture the authors were left to the exercise of their own unaided faculties, and the use and improvement of their ordinary and natural sources of information about the subjects of which they wrote. A notion of this sort prevails extensively among those German writers who are not thorough neologians, and have not gone so far as to deny altogether an immediate supernatural revelation; and some such notion seems to have been entertained by many of those defenders of revelation in our own country, whose defective and unsound views and principles I formerly had occasion to advert to; while an impression of a similar kind, though not so distinctly stated or avowed, prevails, we fear, to some extent among the irreligious portion of professedly Christian society. The general principle upon which

the advocates of this view proceed is this, that we must not admit of any divine agency, of any immediate and supernatural interposition of God in effecting or producing anything which could possibly have been effected without it, and they then quietly set up human reason, *i. e.*, themselves, or their own notions, as competent and adequate judges of whether or not, in a particular case, any immediate divine interposition was necessary. With these principles they come to examine the Bible, take the different books of which it is composed, and the different subjects of which it treats, and set themselves to consider in regard to each book, and each subject, or class of subjects, whether mere men, unaided by any special divine assistance, could not possibly have given us such information as is there presented to us; and whenever there is any plausible ground for the allegation that men might possibly have communicated to us the information conveyed, they forthwith conclude that no divine inspiration was granted, that no special divine agency was exerted in guiding and directing them. On these grounds some defenders of revelation have denied anything like divine inspiration and authority to the historical books of Scripture, because, as they allege, the information they contain might have been acquired by men in the ordinary use of their faculties, and in the unaided improvement of the opportunities they enjoyed, and might, without any special divine assistance, have been transmitted to us with all necessary accuracy. On the same ground they are disposed to exclude from any valid claim to inspiration, or to a divine origin and authority, those portions of Scripture which contain plain precepts of morality, or maxims for the wise and prudent regulation of conduct—as, for example, the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Some writers of this class are even disposed to exclude also the devotional parts of Scripture, as containing in their estimation nothing but what pious and holy men might have spoken and written under the ordinary influences of the Spirit, in expressing their emotions and desires, and describing their spiritual experience. The whole of this general reasoning is unsound, and the application made of it is unwarranted and presumptuous. We are not warranted in laying down the position that God never interposes extraordinarily, never deviates from the ordinary course of nature, never gives special and supernatural communications, when, so far as we can

see, the object which he is *supposed* to have had in view, might have been effected without any such interposition. We know too little of the general principles by which God's conduct is or may be regulated to warrant us in laying down any such position. We know little or nothing, except in so far as God may be pleased to inform us, as to what his whole object was in any particular case, and as to what means were necessary in order to effect that object.

It is conceded by those with whom we are now arguing that God intended to embody in writing, and to convey to us through means of the books of Scripture, an authentic and well accredited revelation of his will; and it is surely very evident that we are not warranted in asserting that he would have accomplished this object, or at least that he would have accomplished it so thoroughly and satisfactorily, as for anything we know he might have desired and intended to do, by superintending and directing the men who were employed for this purpose in some part of their works, and leaving them to their own unaided faculties in the rest, or by putting into our hands a book, some part of which he had himself superintended or dictated, and other parts of which men were left to compose without any such divine assistance. A book which is partly the work of God and partly the work of unaided man is at least a very different book from one which has been wholly prepared under the direction of God. The one, it is manifest, might be fitted to serve purposes and to effect results to which the other would be incompetent. Would not every man who was at all anxious to know fully and certainly God's will conveyed to him by writing, earnestly desire to have it in a book which was really and entirely the word of God, in place of being left to the uncertainty of picking out from the mass of the contents of the book, without any certain test or criterion to guide him, what was God's, and therefore to be implicitly received, and what was man's, and might therefore be disregarded or criticised? And if the one of these would be a far greater boon than the other, and manifestly much better fitted to serve the purpose of being an authentic and satisfactory conveyance of a divine revelation, what certain ground can we have *a priori* for the assertion that God has *not* bestowed it upon us? There are many things which, though not coming under the head of matters of pure revelation—*i.e.* things such that men could have known nothing about them unless God had

supernaturally revealed them, and predictions of future events, which it much concerns us to know, and to know accurately, and from which, in point of fact, believing them to be given by inspiration of God, his people do derive important spiritual advantages, and which the authors of the books of Scripture could not have correctly recorded and transmitted to us unless under the guidance and direction of God. What reliance, for instance, could be placed upon an account of the creation of the world, and the important transactions connected with the origin of our race, by a man who lived 2500 years after they had taken place, unless God had directed him? How would men unaided have produced a history of God's mighty deeds, and of his wonderful works, representing God as he ought to be represented, and as he might wish to make himself known to us in the history of providence, and in regard even to the life, actions, and especially the discourses of our Saviour? How could even his apostles, who had seen and heard them, have given a correct and authentic account of them such as we could rely on, unless they had the guidance of the Holy Spirit, according to their Master's promise, to bring things to their remembrance, and to guide them into all truth? Upon such grounds as these, which might be easily drawn out and illustrated, we prove that the allegation of there being no necessity for such divine guidance throughout as is contended for, and no essential benefit, even were we warranted to make our own views upon these points the ground of our judgment, as we are not, is utterly unfounded, and that we can discern plain traces of God's wisdom and goodness in guiding and superintending, even in matters of which they might have had *some* knowledge without revelation and inspiration, the authors of those books from which men in all subsequent ages were to derive the knowledge of himself, and of the way of salvation. But we must remind you that these considerations afford only an answer to an objection of opponents based upon the alleged non-necessity of any further interposition of divine agency in the production of the books of Scripture than what they admit, and that the proper direct proof of the interposition of divine agency to a much larger extent in this matter is to be found in those arguments which we formerly adverted to under the heads of the external and internal evidences of the divine origin and authority of the Bible. These arguments, derived from the

explicit declarations of our Lord and his apostles regarding the Old Testament, from the commission and gifts of the authors of the books of the New Testament, and the circumstances in which, and the objects for which, they were written, and, from the evidences of God's presence and agency which pervade the Bible itself, prove, if they prove anything, that God's agency was so exerted in the production of the Bible, as a whole, that it may be fairly and truly called His word, as coming from him, and stamped throughout with his authority.

Some of those who profess to hold the divine origin and authority of the Bible go farther than those we have just described, and say that everything in the Bible which respects matters of religion and morality is to be regarded as coming from God, written under his guidance and direction, while they are disposed to think that in other matters, not affecting, as they imagine, religion and morality, the writers were left to the exercise of their own faculties, without any special or supernatural divine assistance. This mode of stating the doctrine may be so explained as to be practically as loose and unsatisfactory as the former, although it must be admitted that many authors who have adopted this mode of stating the subject, seem to have intended to allow a larger measure of divine agency in the production of the books of Scripture than those formerly referred to. The same considerations in substance apply to this view of the subject as to the former. This limitation of God's agency in the production of the books of Scripture has no firm foundation to rest upon. It is but an unwarranted and arbitrary supposition, resting only upon certain ill-founded and presumptuous notions of what was necessary, in order to make a full and perfect revelation of God's will, of what God might have been expected to communicate to men supernaturally, and of what men might have produced without any special assistance from him. It assumes, moreover, that there are things in the Bible which can scarcely be supposed to have come from God, as being unworthy of him and beneath his regard; and more especially as having no connection with religion and morality, and being in no degree fitted to promote or increase our knowledge of God, of his plans and his providence, of the way of salvation, of the worship and homage which are due to him, and of the path of duty.

Many men who are for restricting the agency of God in the production of the Scriptures to what they call matters of religion and morality, would probably shrink from laying down distinctly the positions which have now been stated. But it is quite plain that their theory implies or assumes them, and therefore they should be compelled to take the responsibility of openly asserting and maintaining them. And in discussing these positions we need not be afraid to meet them, for we can easily shew, not only that no proof can be adduced in support of them, though that is enough, but that they can be proved to be unfounded and untrue, inconsistent with right views of what we actually find in the Bible, and with what we learn from Scripture itself concerning the books both of the Old and the New Testaments. If we were to indulge in any *a priori* reasonings upon such a subject, though this is a very unsafe and uncertain ground to occupy, we would be inclined to say that the wisdom and goodness of God would lead him to provide that the book, in the production of which he was immediately and supernaturally concerned, and which was designed by him to be the permanent and the only channel through which his revelation of himself was to be conveyed to the human race,—and all this is admitted by those with whom we are at present contending,—should be all produced under his own immediate superintendence, that it should contain nothing which did not bear more or less directly upon the great object for which a revelation was given, *i.e.* upon matters of religion and morality, and that men would not be left to decide by their own feeble reason as to what things in the book came from God, and were therefore to be applied for increasing their knowledge and guiding them in the path of duty, and what came from men, and were fitted to serve no such end.

There is still a third and higher view upon this subject, held by some who maintain the divine origin and authority of the Bible, but who do not go the whole length of holding its plenary and verbal inspiration. Their view may be stated in this way, that God superintended and directed by his special and immediate agency the whole of what we find recorded in the Bible as to its matter or substance, but not as to the words in which it is set forth. They admit indeed that there are some portions of the Scriptures where the words as well as the matter must have been communicated by divine inspiration. They think, however, that

this was not always necessary, and was not always granted; but that in regard to many things contained in the Scriptures the authors were left to select the words in the exercise of their own natural faculties. They have devised accordingly a variety of modes or degrees of inspiration, called commonly by the names of the inspiration of *elevation*, the inspiration of *superintendence* or *direction*, and the inspiration of *suggestion*; or by some such names of similar import. They think that one kind or degree of inspiration might be necessary for the production of one part of the Bible, that a higher degree might be necessary for producing another portion of it, while a lower might be sufficient for a third; and they are very careful and anxious to admit no higher kind or degree of inspiration in any part of the Bible than they are pleased in their wisdom to think absolutely necessary. The distinction between an inspiration of the matter and an inspiration of the words has no foundation in any of the statements of Scripture. The different kinds and degrees of inspiration which have been laid down and described are mere devices of human wisdom, to which God has given no countenance. The basis and foundation on which they principally rest is just the same as that of the other defective and erroneous views upon this subject to which we have already adverted, viz., an *a priori* resolution to admit no more of divine agency in the matter than is absolutely necessary, combined with certain unwarranted notions as to what kind and degree of divine agency or of inspiration may be necessary for producing the intended result; although at the same time it is but right to mention that they usually profess and attempt to shew that a distinction between the inspiration of the matter and of the words, and the supposition of different kinds and degrees of inspiration are, if not supported by the explicit statements of Scripture, yet suggested and sanctioned by the actual phenomena which the Scripture presents, and afford materials for solving some difficulties connected with the subject of God's agency and man's agency in the production of the books of Scripture, which they think cannot otherwise be easily disposed of. We have now conducted you to the borders of what we believe to be the truth upon this subject, the doctrine of the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, and this, upon grounds formerly explained, we mean to treat distinctly and

separately under the head of inspiration, as distinguished from the more indefinite and general subject of the divine origin and authority of the Bible.

The observations which have been made in this lecture upon the different views entertained by men who profess to believe in some sense in the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures have been laid before you, not so much because of their intrinsic importance, and not with the view of fully discussing them, but rather for the purpose (which I desire habitually to aim at) of aiding you in your own study of the subject by the perusal of works in which these topics are handled; and you may perhaps find them useful to assist you in understanding, estimating, and appreciating the works you may have occasion to peruse upon this subject. We formerly had occasion to warn you against the loose and erroneous views of the inspiration of the Scriptures which are to be found in many able and standard works upon the evidences, and the same warning must be extended to many valuable works upon the divine origin and authority of the Bible, as distinguished from the truth of the Christian revelation, and to many which profess to discuss the subject of inspiration. You will find that not a few works which profess to treat of the subject of inspiration, and to maintain the divine origin and authority of the Bible, support one or other of the different modifications of sentiment which have been explained in the preceding part of this lecture, that few of them comparatively maintain the plenary verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, while many of them argue against it. They are valuable and useful in their own place, and for their own proper object, just as those works are which establish the external miraculous and historical evidence for the truth of Christianity. But they are not in general satisfactory discussions of the inspiration of Scripture, though they sometimes profess to establish its inspiration; and it is right therefore that you should be warned against their defects and errors upon this important subject. You will find in many of them good and important matter in proof of the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures, in the sense, or rather in some one or other of the senses, in which we have just explained this subject, and *that* you may use and improve for its proper purpose without being led astray by their defective and erroneous views upon the subject of inspiration.

With these observations I would now briefly advert to some of the principal works which have been written upon the subject of the divine origin and authority of the Bible, and which embody some discussion of the nature and extent of God's agency in the production of it, as distinguished from the general truth of Christianity. In the year 1690 there was published in this country a work, entitled *Five Letters concerning the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, translated out of the French*. These letters were taken from two works published anonymously, but written by the celebrated Le Clerc, and entitled *Sentiments of some Divines of Holland on Father Simon's Critical History of the Old Testament*; and *Defence of these Sentiments*. Le Clerc was a man of very loose latitudinarian views upon all theological subjects, and by the boldness and presumption of his speculations contributed, along with Spinoza and the English deists, to lay the foundations of German neology. These letters excited a good deal of notice, and occasioned some controversy. The views which they advocated were just in substance those which we have described in the first part of this lecture, as differing very little from the Socinian view which denies inspiration altogether. The letters are characterised by considerable ingenuity; and, in order to vindicate himself from the charge of being an infidel, Le Clerc has introduced what must be admitted to be a good statement of the substance of the evidence for the general truth of the Christian revelation, as distinguished from the inspiration and divine authority of the Bible. The chief authors whom Le Clerc quotes in support of his views are Erasmus, Grotius, and Episcopius; and though it cannot be proved that they went so far as he did, yet they certainly gave too much countenance to his theory. A reply to Le Clerc was published by Lowth, the author of a well-known and in many respects valuable commentary upon the prophets, and father of the still more celebrated Bishop Lowth. It is entitled *A Vindication of the Divine Authority and Inspiration of the Writings of the Old and New Testament*; and while it contains some good and useful things in answer to the lower views of Le Clerc, it advocates the theory that the inspiration of the sacred writers was confined to matters of religion and morality, and that in other matters they were left to themselves, and sometimes fell into mistakes. Another reply was made to Le Clerc by Lamotte,

which I have not seen, but which is said to be a better and abler book than Lowth's. Several other works were published soon after, which, though not intended merely as answers to Le Clerc, opposed his principles, and advocated much sounder though still somewhat defective views of the inspiration and divine authority of the Scriptures. The principal of these were Bishop Williams' *Boyle Lectures*, and two works upon the subject of inspiration by eminent dissenting ministers, Dr Edmund Calamy and Mr Benjamin Bennet. These are all valuable works, and contain much important matter. Their authors carry their views of the nature and extent of inspiration much farther than Lowth, and approach much nearer the truth. None of them formally discusses the question of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. They rather leave it out, or pass it, intimating however their opinion that it is not necessary to take up that position, while yet they sometimes make statements so full and sound that consistency would seem to require of them that the verbal inspiration of Scripture should be admitted. The fullest and best of these works is Calamy's, entitled *The Inspiration of the Holy Writings of the Old and New Testament considered and improved*, published in 1716; and his views are, upon the whole, so sound that there is little or nothing to object to, except that he has not asserted and defended the plenary verbal inspiration.

The next two works of any considerable importance that treat of this subject are to be found in well-known commentaries upon the New Testament, viz., Whitby's general *Preface* to his *Paraphrase and Commentary upon the New Testament*, and Doddridge's *Dissertation on the Inspiration of the New Testament*, subjoined to the historical books, in his *Family Expositor*. Both of these works contain able and satisfactory defences of the divine authority, and, in a certain sense, inspiration of the New Testament; but they both deny, and argue against, its plenary verbal inspiration, and they both vindicate those different kinds and degrees of inspiration which the wisdom of man has invented and set forth as sufficient for the production of some parts of the Bible, and as superseding the necessity of ascribing it all to God and the agency of his Spirit.

The only other work to which I think it necessary at present to

refer is the late Dr Dick's essay on *The Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*. It is a highly respectable work, and contains much sound and judicious matter ; but you will be certainly disappointed if you expect to find in it, what its title seems to promise, a discussion of the subject of inspiration. It is substantially a book upon the evidences of Christianity, including in a general sense the divine origin of the Scriptures, without any investigation of the higher and more specific questions usually comprehended under the head of inspiration. The arguments for the general truth of Christianity and for the divine authority of the Scriptures are mixed up together in a way that is somewhat confused and perplexing ; and on the subject of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, it gives a somewhat uncertain sound, though the author seems, upon the whole, to be rather unfavourable to what we believe to be the true principle upon that point.

The works which have been mentioned treat rather of the divine origin and authority of the Bible than of its inspiration in its stricter and higher sense. Those which treat more fully and formally of the nature and extent of inspiration will be mentioned when we come to discuss that subject. Before proceeding however to treat of the subject of inspiration in its higher and more restricted sense, we must complete the subject of the evidences by some examination of the subject of the agency and witness of the Spirit in convincing men that the Holy Scripture is the word of God, in illustration of the doctrine which we quoted in last lecture from the fifth section of the first chapter of the Confession of Faith, in opposition to those who deny that any divine testimony is necessary, and to the Papists, who substitute the testimony of the church for the witness of the Holy Ghost.



LECTURE XXIV.

DIFFICULTIES IN GENERAL—RATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL EVIDENCE — TESTIMONY OF THE SPIRIT — ROMISH SCEPTICISM.

THE evidence, external and internal, by which we prove the truth of Christianity and the divine origin and authority of the Bible, is in right reason quite sufficient to establish them. They can be proved conclusively upon grounds and principles which assume nothing that men in the sound exercise of their faculties could deny or disprove. As a mere question of argument upon rational principles, the proof is complete; so that wherever we meet with men who deny the truth of Christianity and the divine origin of the Bible, whatever may be their character, and whatever grounds they may take up, we can rationally establish them upon evidence which they cannot answer, and to which in right reason they ought to yield. Objections and difficulties indeed of various degrees of strength or plausibility have been adduced against all the different departments of the Christian evidence, but most of these have been directly and conclusively answered. And if there are any which do not admit of being fully and directly answered, they are such as respect not the evidence but the contents of revelation, and therefore general answers, derived from the unanswerableness of the proper evidence, from the exalted character of the subject, the ignorance of man, and the weakness of human reason, are, upon sound and generally recognised principles, sufficient to dispose of them. They are mere difficulties, and are neither refutations of the positive proofs, nor proofs of a negative, upon the great general question. It is utterly inconsistent with the principles recognised and acted upon in regard to every

other branch of knowledge, that mere difficulties, even though they were much more numerous and formidable than any which attach to the evidence for the truth of Christianity and the Bible, should prevent the submission of the understanding to proof which cannot be overturned, even though it only preponderated over what could be adduced upon the other side. The difficulties which attach more or less to all truths not comprehended within the limits of the exact sciences, and which ingenuity may invest with some plausibility, are virtually tests of men's character, *i.e.* of their honest love of truth, of their being more ready to seek truth and to follow rational evidence wherever it may lead them, than to indulge any selfish feeling, or to pursue any personal objects of their own. This principle applies more fully to the investigation of the truth of Christianity and the Bible than to any other subject whatever, just because the admission or denial of it bears much more directly and extensively upon character and motive than any other. But the principle holds more or less in the investigation of all moral questions. The difficulties and objections that may be adduced, although of no real or rational weight in opposition to the proofs on the other side, afford a sort of plausible excuse for men taking either side they like, and thus contribute to make their decision the result, not so much of an impartial investigation of the evidence, as of some other collateral motives or objects that may have influenced them. This is virtually the principle that is involved in our Saviour's remarkable declaration to Thomas, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John xx. 29). Thomas had previously sufficient and conclusive evidence that Christ had risen from the dead, in the testimony of his fellow-apostles assuring him that they had "seen the Lord." On this ground he ought to have believed it; and it was neither a virtuous nor a rational state of mind which led him to declare that he would not believe unless he were permitted to put his finger into the print of the nails, and to thrust his hand into Christ's side. His Master was pleased to grant him the evidence he demanded, although it was unnecessary in sound reason, and although he had no right to it. But he at the same time gently reproached Thomas for his unreasonable conduct, and intimated plainly that to have believed in the reality of his resurrection upon evidence inferior to that which he had just

enjoyed, but yet quite sufficient in itself, would have indicated at once a more rational use of his faculties, and a sounder and more creditable state of heart. There is nothing in our Saviour's declaration which encourages or demands credulity in regard to his claims. It assumes indeed that Thomas had had, and that others would have, sufficient evidence of his resurrection from the dead, without having the evidence of their senses in support of it; and it implies that those who believed in such circumstances would act a more rational and becoming part than he, whose unwillingness to believe, in whatever precise cause it may have originated, had been overcome only by evidence which no unwillingness to believe, and no strength of motive drawing him in an opposite direction could, according to the ordinary principles of man's constitution, have enabled him to resist. This is substantially what is involved in our Saviour's declaration, and it can be proved to be entirely accordant with the dictates of sound philosophy, and the voice of universal experience.

We do not require indeed to have recourse to any such general considerations in actually dealing with unbelievers. Our business in dealing with them is to set before them the proof, the sufficient and satisfactory proof, which should lead those who have not seen to believe that Christ rose from the dead, and to answer their objections against its sufficiency and conclusiveness. But it is satisfactory to ourselves to be able to explain, in accordance with the recognised principles of human nature and the ordinary experience of mankind, how it is that, without being able to answer our arguments, men still continue to reject our conclusions. Grotius had certainly nothing fanatical about him; and yet he has distinctly laid down this principle of the actual strength of evidence for the truth of Christianity, viewed as a mere question of argumentation, and of the plausibility of some of the difficulties that may be adduced against it, operating as a test of character; that is, as putting to the test whether or not men are really influenced by an honest desire of ascertaining and following the truth. In the conclusion of his second book, *De Veritate*, in answer to the allegation that Christianity, if true, should have been more conclusively established by evidence, he makes the following statement upon this subject:—

“Voluit autem Deus id, quod credi a nobis vellet, non ita evidenter patere,

ut quæ sensu aut demonstratione percipiuntur ; sed quantum satis esset ad fidem faciendam, remque persuadendam homini non pertinaci ; ut ita sermo Evangelii tanquam lapis esset Lydius, ad quem ingenia sanabilia explorarentur. Nam cum ea, quæ diximus, argumenta tam multos probos, eosdemque sapientes in assensum traxerint ; hoc ipso liquet, apud cæteros incredulitatis causam non in probationis penuria esse positam, sed in eo, quod nolint verum videri id, quod affectibus suis adversatur."

As we are called upon to be ever ready to give a reason of the hope that is in us, it is our duty to be able to give some explanation of the grounds on which we believe in the truth of Christianity and in the divine origin of the Bible. And it is incumbent upon us to be able to establish them, both for the conviction of gainsayers and the confirmation of believers. All argumentation must be deduced, in some sense, *ex concessis*, from principles conceded or admitted by those with whom we argue, however far back it may sometimes be necessary to go in order to find them ; and when we are seeking to explain the grounds by which the truth of Christianity and the divine origin of the Bible may be established for the satisfaction of our own minds, the confirmation of our own faith, or for the confirmation of believers who may have been assaulted with temptations to infidelity, there are considerations which may be adduced, and which may possess real argumentative weight, which would have no force with an unbeliever, just because not based upon principles which he admitted, or could in the first instance, and without some intermediate stages in the argument, and in its impression upon his mind, be required in strict logic to admit. These branches of argument, however, by which we ourselves might be satisfied of the divine origin and authority of the Bible, but which did not admit of being brought to bear upon unbelievers, so as in strict logic to compel their assent, are derived exclusively from two sources—first, from the self-evidencing power of the Bible, or those marks and traces of divine origin and authority which are impressed upon the Bible itself, and which are opened up to the mind in the course of a devout and prayerful study of it ; and second, from those effects which the doctrines of Christianity and the statements of the Bible have produced upon our minds and hearts, our character and conduct, in changing our natures, and in leading us to live to God's glory and service. Now, these things apply only to those who have not merely been persuaded that the Bible is the

word of God, but who have come into contact with the revelation itself, and submitted their understandings and hearts to its influence, who have been born again of the word of God through the belief of the truth. And this we know, in point of fact, is never done except through the operation and under the influence of God's Spirit. And hence some have distinguished these two departments of evidence, viz., that by which unbelievers may be and should be convinced, and that by which, though it does not admit of the same direct bearing upon unbelievers, may be applied in confirming our own faith, by the names of the *rational* and the *spiritual* evidences. The nomenclature is not very correct, and it is fitted to convey erroneous impressions, and this in two ways:—

1. It seems to imply that the spiritual evidence is not rational; whereas, though seen and felt only by those who have been brought by the operation of the Spirit under the influence of the regenerating and sanctifying force of the truth, and therefore not admitting of being brought to bear fully upon those who have not been the subjects of this operation, it is to those who have it a perfectly rational ground of belief, with which their understandings may be and should be fully satisfied. It is not a fanatical delusion, a vague and mystical impression, but an argument which can be fully vindicated in accordance with the principles of man's constitution. That some of the materials upon which it rests are derived from our own individual consciousness, and therefore cannot be fully established to the satisfaction of others, who are not bound to believe our testimony upon this point, does not affect its proper intrinsic validity to those who, by their own consciousness, are possessed of these materials. To say that men's consciousness of what they have been enabled mentally to discern and experience may deceive them is true, but not to the purpose; for this is nothing more than may be said of all the powers and capacities by which men acquire knowledge and form judgments. All men's faculties may sometimes deceive them; but this is never regarded—except by mere sceptics, who are beyond the reach of argument—as any reason for denying the possibility of acquiring certain knowledge, or for calling upon men to place no reliance upon the ordinary operations of their faculties.

2. This distinction between the rational and the spiritual evidences may seem to imply a notion which is in some respects the

reverse of that which we have just exposed, but which is equally erroneous, viz., that the Spirit does not employ what is comprehended under the head of the rational evidence in producing faith in the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures. Whatever is in right reason a proof of the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures, whatever upon the principles of sound logic possesses real argumentative weight to establish the conclusion, may be employed by the Spirit for producing that faith which is his gift; that is, may be employed by the Spirit for deepening and confirming those convictions which in its own nature, and in virtue of its argumentative weight, it is fitted to produce. For it may be laid down as a general principle that there is no truth connected with religion which the Holy Spirit may not, and does not, as he sees meet, impress upon men's minds; and there is no sound argument that really goes to establish or confirm the truth, which he may not employ for producing conviction. What then has sometimes been called the spiritual evidence is also rational, though it may not be directly available for convincing unbelievers; and what has been called rational is spiritual, at least in this sense, that it may be and has been employed by the Spirit for producing conviction.

The proper deduction to be noticed and preserved upon this subject are these two—First, that the one department of evidence is fitted to convince unbelievers, resting upon principles which they cannot dispute without overturning the certainty of all human knowledge, and conducting by a process of argument which they cannot at any point answer, or overturn, or evade, to the conclusion that Christ was a teacher sent from God, and that the Scriptures came from God; and that the other is directly fitted only to confirm the faith of those whose eyes have already been opened to behold the wondrous things contained in God's law, and who have been born again of the word of God through the belief of the truth. The second distinction is this, that the evidence of the one class may be understood and perceived, and that the conclusion to which it leads may be admitted, without men having enjoyed the Spirit's teaching, or having become the subjects of his operations; while the materials on which the other is based partly are not seen, and partly do not exist, until the Spirit of God has been sent forth into men's hearts, and has pro-

duced there some of his leading peculiar results. Whatever difficulty there may be in explaining, or even in describing, the character and conduct of men who profess to be convinced of the truth of Christianity and the divine origin and authority of the Bible, but who yet have never examined the Christian revelation with attention and seriousness, and are manifestly not affected in their character and conduct by the contents of that revelation, we are not entitled to deny that such men, if they have examined the evidences, if they profess themselves convinced of their sufficiency, and are able and willing to give a satisfactory explanation of the grounds of their convictions, and to defend them against the objections of adversaries—are in some sense honestly persuaded of the truth of the revelation, though it may be abundantly evident that their conduct is marked by great inconsistency, and that they have never enjoyed the teaching of the Spirit. They have examined the question of the truth of Christianity just as they would have examined a question in any other department of knowledge, and perhaps just in some measure *because* of their entire carelessness and indifference about the contents of the revelation, and their utter want of any sense of the obligation which an admission of its truth imposes, have come to the conclusion that there is sufficient ground to believe in its divine original. There is sufficient evidence to convince unbelievers of this as a mere question of argument; and it is quite possible that men in the fair use of their faculties, without any special divine assistance, and without any operation of the divine Spirit, may come to this conclusion, and assert and maintain it. They have the whole of the external evidence to deal with. It is perfectly comprehensible by them. It may be understood by them in all its branches; and its force and conclusiveness, as a mere piece of argumentation, may be seen and apprehended. A portion of what is usually comprehended under the head of the internal evidence is also fully subject to their cognizance, and may be apprehended and appreciated by them; we mean everything about the general character and the particular features of the Christian revelation and the sacred Scriptures, which goes directly to establish this proposition, that they could not have been invented and devised by men, especially by men so circumstanced as those from whom the Christian revelation, and the books which contain it,

proceeded. This is a proposition which, from its very nature, comes within the cognizance of man's ordinary faculties and capacities of judging; and materials sufficient to establish it may be pointed out in the Christian revelation, and in the New Testament, the perception and appreciation of which do not necessarily require or imply that thorough, intimate, efficacious knowledge of divine truth which proceeds only from the Spirit of God. If we take the word *experimental* in the wide sense which it may not unwarrantably bear, and in which we formerly explained it, as comprehending every argument for the truth of Christianity derived from the reception it has met with, and the effects it has produced upon men collectively and individually, then there is something too under this head, as well as under that of the internal evidence, which may be addressed to unbelievers, which can be logically commended to their understandings, and which may and should operate rationally in leading them to the conviction that Christianity and the Bible came from God, without any special operations of the Holy Spirit, or without requiring the admission or application of any of those materials which his agency alone can provide; especially the arguments derived from the propagation of Christianity, and the general effects which Christianity and the Bible have actually produced upon the state of the world wherever they have been known and received. Thus the whole of the external and a portion of the internal and experimental evidence for the truth of Christianity and the divine origin of the Bible may be addressed to unbelievers; may be established to their satisfaction as a mere question of argument; may, upon the principles of sound reasoning and strict logic, be commended to their understandings, and may produce such a conviction in their minds as in consistency and common sense should lead them to a diligent, serious, and prayerful study of the Bible. And all this class of arguments, sometimes, as we have said, called the rational evidence, may be used by believers, and may be employed by the Spirit, for confirming them in their most holy faith; while they enjoy also, for their confirmation and encouragement, and to aid them in resisting any temptations to infidelity with which they may be assailed, other arguments coming under the head of the internal and experimental evidence, the materials of which exist partly in the revelation itself and the sacred books which

contain it, and partly in their own hearts, but for which, both in their existence and in their application and effect, they are wholly indebted to, and dependent upon, the agency of the Holy Spirit.

It is right that we should understand and appreciate the entire sufficiency and conclusiveness of the evidence by which, upon rational principles, requiring no spiritual discernment, no supernatural opening of the eyes, no radical change of men's moral principles, no immediate agency of the Spirit of God, we can bring home to unbelievers, as a mere question of argument, the truth of the proposition that Christianity and the Bible came from God; by which we can logically compel them to admit this, or to stand self-condemned by their manifest refusal to give their fair rational weight to arguments which they cannot answer, and to follow out principles which they cannot deny without overturning the certainty of all human knowledge, and by which, in regard to other departments of knowledge, they themselves are guided. It is thus that we stop the mouths of gainsayers, and establish against every opponent, and upon rational principles, the thoroughly rational character of our belief in the divine origin of Christianity and the Bible, and can bring home to all with whom we may come into contact, whatever ground they may choose to assume in this matter—unless indeed they take refuge in absolute scepticism, and deny that men can know anything—an obligation to admit the truth of the Christian revelation, and a consequent obligation to receive and submit to it as coming from God.

The other departments of proof, which cannot be brought to bear directly upon unbelievers, as not being based upon principles which, while unbelievers, and as such, they can be logically required to admit, but which are well fitted to confirm the faith of those who have submitted to the truth and have been brought under the agency of the Spirit, are the self-evidencing power of the Bible, coming under the head of the internal evidence, and the effects which Christianity and the Bible have produced upon their own heart and character, coming under the head of the experimental evidence, and constituting indeed what is usually known under that name. Before proceeding to advert more particularly to the agency of the Spirit in this matter, it is proper to mention that, though arguments of this sort do not possess probative power to unbelievers who openly deny the divine origin

of Christianity and the Bible, so that they can be compelled, as a matter of argumentation, to admit their soundness, and to submit to their force, or at least to be silent, yet it is most commonly by considerations derived from these sources that unbelievers are in fact converted. (Few men who have been led openly to deny the truth of Christianity, and to contend against the force of the arguments by which it is usually commended to the understandings of infidels, have been persuaded of the truth of Christianity and the divine origin of the Bible, by those arguments by which they ought, in right reason and in sound logic, to have been convinced of this.) When such persons have been converted, it has been most commonly through the preaching of the gospel, that is, the exposition of the substance and leading features of the Christian revelation, or the reading of the Scriptures, even when previously they did not believe the gospel or the Bible to have come from God. And of course their conversion must have been effected by the Spirit's enabling them to see something of the self-evidencing power of the gospel and the Bible, and satisfying them of their divine origin by the impressions and changes which he himself produced by their instrumentality upon their hearts. When such results take place, then men will soon indeed see the futility of the objections which they may have been accustomed to adduce against the arguments with which they were formerly plied, and be convinced that these arguments are, upon rational grounds, conclusive and unanswerable. But they will soon also see that considerations, which at one time they thought unworthy of serious examination, and fit only to be treated with ridicule, are possessed of a weight and influence well fitted to secure to them at once respect and success. The practical inference to be deduced from this fact—for it is a fact, established by abundant experience—is, that even in dealing with open deniers of the truth of Christianity and the Bible, we should not omit, as means that may be useful, the preaching of the gospel and the reading of the Bible, if they can be prevailed upon to listen.

In that part of the fifth section of the first chapter of the Confession of Faith, which I formerly explained and illustrated, several considerations on which I briefly commented (and which rank partly under the external, though chiefly under the internal

evidence), are declared to be "arguments whereby the Holy Scripture doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God;" and then the Confession goes on to say, "Yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts." The particulars specified in the preceding part of the section, and described as being "arguments whereby the Holy Scripture doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God," are all, as I formerly explained to you, such as may be in some measure understood and apprehended even by men who have not been brought under the power of the truth or the influence of the Spirit. Even to these then there are considerations to be found in and to be derived from the Scripture itself, whereby it may be abundantly evidenced to be the word of God. This implies that there are materials for bringing home to them, even without the agency of the Spirit, a conviction to which they ought to yield, and which ought to produce some practical results. And the substance of what is set forth in the clause we are now considering is this, that there is a firmer conviction, a more thorough persuasion of the truth and divine authority of the Scriptures than any which mere arguments as such can produce; that this is to be ascribed to the agency of the Spirit; and that the Spirit produces it in men's hearts through the instrumentality of the word itself. This is a doctrine which can be learned only from the Scriptures, and can be proved only by arguments taken from that source. Its truth can be fully established from the statements of the Bible. But I refer to it at present chiefly for the purpose of giving you a brief statement of some discussions that have taken place with respect to the witness or testimony of the Spirit in connection with the establishment of the divine authority of the Scriptures, and the grounds of our certain persuasion or assured conviction that they are the word of God. The discussions which have taken place upon this subject are of a somewhat intricate and subtle description, and have not always been conducted with sufficient care and perspicuity, even by those whose views were in the main correct. This subject entered largely into the discussions which took place between the Protestants and the Church of Rome at the era of the

Reformation ; and in some of its aspects it has been discussed also between orthodox and evangelical Protestants and some of the Latitudinarian, or, as they commonly call themselves, rational defenders of Christianity. It has always been one leading artifice of the Church of Rome in controversy, and one by which she has succeeded in deluding and deceiving many, to represent any other system but her own as attended with great doubts and uncertainties, as affording no firm and stable basis on which man's faith and hope may rest ; that thus she may shut them up into the authority of an infallible church, which is alleged to enjoy the certain presence and the unerring guidance of the Holy Spirit. The leading questions which she has started with this view, and which she has laboured to involve in as much darkness and obscurity as she could, are these three—1. How can men know with certainty that the Scriptures are the word of God ? 2. How can men know with certainty what is the meaning of the statements of Scripture, or be assured that the meaning which they may attach to them is correct ? 3. How can men attain to any comfortable assurance that they individually are in a safe state, and may look forward with confidence to heaven as their rest ?

The Church of Rome has laboured hard to prove that none of these questions can be satisfactorily answered ; that nothing like certainty or assurance can be attained in regard to any of the subjects to which they refer, except by admitting the infallibility of the church and submitting to her guidance. And in discussing these various points, and endeavouring to establish a ground of certainty in regard to them, the Reformers, and indeed evangelical Protestants in general, have given much prominence to the witness or testimony of the Holy Spirit. In regard to the last of these questions, respecting the assurance of personal salvation, it does not come at all within the class of subjects that for the present must occupy our attention. We would only remark in passing, since we have been led to mention it, that it was in consequence of the labours of Romish writers to shew that there could be no certain ground for personal assurance of salvation except in the authority of the church ; that there was inserted in what is commonly called "The National Covenant of Scotland" a condemnation of what is described as "the general and doubtful faith of

the Romish Church"; and that the authors of the Westminster Confession, after asserting that believers may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, added, "This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion founded upon a fallible hope, but an infallible assurance of faith." We may also observe that it was the anxiety of the Reformers to establish a firm ground of personal assurance in opposition to the labours of Papists to overturn every other ground except that miserable one which they hold out to their deluded votaries, and which has sunk millions to hell with a lie in their right hand, that led some of them to fall into the error of representing assurance as of the essence, and to include it in their formal definition of saving faith; an error which has been carefully corrected in the Westminster Confession.

The second of these questions, about the grounds of the certainty of our knowledge of the true meaning of Scripture, we shall have occasion to advert to in a subsequent part of the course, when we have to explain the general principles bearing upon the ascertaining and establishing of the true import of the word of God. It is with the first of these questions only that we have at present to do. But the further prosecution of this subject must be deferred till next lecture.



LECTURE XXV.

TESTIMONY OF THE SPIRIT, FOLLOWING THE CONFESSION OF FAITH.

THE general subject which I brought under your notice in last lecture, and mean to prosecute in this, is usually discussed by the older divines under the head of the authority of the Holy Scripture, and may be said to comprehend a discussion of the causes, grounds, and reasons of our faith, or firm and assured persuasion of the divine origin and authority of the Bible. The authority of the Scripture is its right to command, to exercise sovereign control, to be received and employed as the supreme and ultimate standard of our opinions and actions. If it has any such right or authority, this must come from God, who alone is Lord of the conscience ; and hence the Confession of Faith says, in the fourth section of the first chapter, the one just preceding that to which I have already adverted, and mean again to advert to more fully, "The authority of Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof, and therefore it is to be received because it is the word of God." This seems a very evident, almost a self-evident principle ; and yet, like almost all the other statements in the Confession, it is a deliverance upon a point of controversy, a denial of an error that has been broached. The error that is here denied is one that was maintained by some of the bolder and less scrupulous Papists, who, in their anxiety to depress the Scriptures and to magnify the church, asserted that their authority depended upon, or was derived from, the testimony of the church ; or, in other words, that the formal ground or reason why we are bound to submit to the

authority of the Scriptures, was, not because God was their author, and has given them to us, requiring us by his own authority to believe and obey them, but merely because the church has propounded them to us as authoritative. It was against this error that the declaration just quoted from the Confession was directed. Some, however, of the abler and more cautious Papists saw that this was a principle too offensive and too evidently erroneous to be maintained with plausibility or success, and invented a distinction between the authority of the Scripture, absolutely and relatively, its authority in itself, and its authority in reference to us—in *se* and *quoad nos*—admitting, in accordance with the principle laid down in the Confession, that its authority, absolutely and in itself, depends only on God its author, *i.e.* is based upon its being God's word, they still maintain that its authority relatively to us depends upon the testimony of the church proclaiming it to be the word of God and authoritative. By this they mean in substance, not that Scripture derives its authority or its binding and obliging powers from the church, but that the testimony of the church is not merely a part of the proof or evidence by which the Scripture may be shewn to be the word of God, but is the basis and foundation of the whole proof, and affords thereby certain arguments by which men can be thoroughly persuaded that the Scripture is of divine origin, and is therefore possessed of infallible authority. In opposition to this doctrine, the Confession lays down the principle which I quoted in last lecture, viz., "yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts." A statement which may be regarded as embodying these propositions—first, that men, without believing in the infallibility of any man or church, may attain to a full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Holy Scripture—in other words, to a firm and assured faith or conviction that it is the word of God; and second, that this is to be produced by the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts. When the Papists put the question, as they often do, "How do you know with certainty that the Scripture is the word of God?" their object, as I explained in the end of my last lecture,

is to involve the proof of this truth, which they profess to hold as well as we, in as much doubt or uncertainty as possible, in order to shut up men to the testimony of an infallible church as the only sure and certain evidence in support of it. When Protestants have answered this question by referring to the various branches of evidence by which we can and do prove against unbelievers, first, the general truth of the Christian revelation; and then second, the divine origin and authority of the books of Scripture, some Popish writers have grasped at the opportunity thus afforded them of taking up the infidel cause, and have exerted their ingenuity in labouring to shew that these proofs, even as against infidels, are attended with great and almost inextricable difficulties, and that they cannot form the basis or ground of any firm or certain persuasion. And indeed it is very manifest that many Popish writers have been willing enough to help to make men infidels, if they could only withdraw them from the ranks of Protestantism. They have given abundant evidence that they were ready to contribute to overturn the foundations of all faith and all religion, in the hope of catching some of those who might thus be thrown loose; a fact which tends, along with others of a similar kind, to prove that Satan, though he is no doubt well aware that Papacy is his masterpiece, from the singular skill with which it is fitted to secure and retain a powerful ascendancy over the minds of multitudes, does not care much whether men become Papists or infidels.

Other Popish writers, however, having more regard to decency, and admitting that the controversy between them and Protestants upon this point does not turn upon the question whether the Scriptures are the word of God, and can be satisfactorily proved to be so against those who deny it,—as the more respectable Popish writers, when dealing with infidels, establish the divine origin and authority of the Bible, very much in the same way as Protestants do,—but upon this question whether or not Protestants denying the infallibility of the church, can have any certain and assured ground for the persuasion they entertain that the Scriptures are the word of God, meet the adduction of the ordinary arguments by which this is proved against infidels, by a statement to this effect, that these arguments, though sufficient to stop the mouths of gainsayers, cannot be the ground of a firm and certain persua-

sion, since they are based only upon the testimony of man, and upon these general rational arguments or motives of credibility which may apply to other subjects of historical investigation, and cannot lay a basis for that firm and unwavering persuasion which faith implies, and which alone can be satisfactory as the ground of procedure in religious matters. The schoolmen were accustomed to make a distinction between what they called human or acquired faith based upon human testimony, and divine or infused faith based upon divine testimony. The Papists applied this distinction to the matter in hand, and asserted that the ordinary rational arguments by which the Scriptures might be proved as against infidels, resolved ultimately into human testimony, and therefore could not be the basis of a divine faith or a full persuasion and assurance; and that the divine testimony which alone could be the basis of a divine faith, and alone therefore could afford a full security and a satisfactory ground for reliance in the conviction that the Scriptures are the word of God, is to be found only in the testimony of the church, which, being infallibly guided by the Holy Spirit, thus brings a divine testimony to bear upon the conclusive settlement of the question, and the thorough establishment of men's convictions. Now, in dealing with this objection of the Papists, the Reformers generally conceded to them, that a divine as distinguished from a human faith was necessary, in order that God's revelation might produce all its proper intended effects, and that men might derive from it all the benefits which it was intended to convey or confer, and moreover, that this divine faith must rest upon a divine testimony; but they contended—first, that the testimony of the church was not a divine testimony, since its claim to infallibility, or to the constant guidance of the Holy Spirit in preserving it from all error, not only could not be established, but could be proved to be utterly unfounded; and second, that believers, though denying the infallibility of the church, had a divine testimony to the infallible truth and authority of the Holy Scripture, in the testimony or witness of the Spirit.

In regard to the first of these topics, the alleged infallibility of the church, we shall have occasion to advert to it when we come to consider its bearing upon the interpretation of Scripture, or the discovery of its true and certain meaning. It is with

the second topic we have at present to do. Our faith in the Christian revelation itself, or in the truth of the contents of the Scriptures, may be said in a sense to rest upon a divine testimony, inasmuch as we believe and submit to it only because we are persuaded that it came from God. But the question we are at present considering respects a different point, viz., whether or not, and if so, how, we have or may have a divine testimony *as the basis of a divine faith that it did come from God, that it is his word*. There is some difficulty in forming a clear and definite conception of some of the views that have been propounded in regard to the distinction between a divine and a human faith, as founded respectively upon a divine and a human testimony. Owen and Halyburton have both laboured this distinction in their books upon the reason of faith, but do not, so far as I can see, give any very clear or satisfactory explanation of it, though these works certainly contain a great deal of valuable and excellent matter. What is necessary practically, and without entering into useless speculations upon this subject, is, that men have such a conviction of the divine origin and authority of the sacred Scriptures, resting upon grounds of the validity of which they are satisfied, as frees them from all doubt and anxiety, as is sufficient to preserve them from danger of falling into infidelity; and especially, and above all, as leads them to study aright the Scripture itself, the word of God, and to submit implicitly to its guidance. That no man has ever had such a faith or conviction of the divine origin and authority of the Bible produced in his mind by the means of what are sometimes called the rational evidences by which this can be established against infidels, as in point of fact led him to such a study of the word that he was thereby made wise unto salvation, we know no grounds whatever for asserting. There is nothing either in the constitution of man, or in any information which God has given us, as to his own ordinary procedure in conferring upon men knowledge and salvation, which precludes the possibility of such a result. It is true that when such a man has been brought under the influence of the truth itself, he will, under the guidance of the same Spirit who opened his eyes to behold God's glory and to see Christ, discern both in the self-evidencing power of the Bible, and in the effects which its statements have produced upon himself, new and stronger

proofs than ever he had before of its divine origin; and if he thought previously that upon the ground of the rational evidences he was secure against the danger of falling into infidelity, he will feel now more clearly and decidedly that it is in a manner impossible, after what he has seen and experienced, that he should ever come to deny or even to doubt that the Bible is the word of God. All this is true; it is realised in the experience of believers, and in these circumstances, they do or may possess a full persuasion and assurance, such as is quite sufficient to fill them with peace and joy, that in walking by the Bible they are following a safe and sure guide which will conduct them at length to heaven and happiness. A fuller persuasion, however, a higher and more perfect assurance of the divine origin and authority of the Bible, does not seem to be what is intended by the distinction between a human and divine faith, by many authors who have treated of this subject. They treat it as a difference in kind, and not in degree; though it is to be observed that the Confession of Faith does not specify anything as to its nature, properly so called, as distinguished from its cause and source, except that it is a full persuasion and assurance. The ascription indeed of this full persuasion and assurance to the inward work of the Holy Spirit implies that the faith or conviction produced by the mere influence of the rational arguments, which may be made good, according to the ordinary principles of men's constitution and the ordinary rules of reasoning, as against unbelievers, does not possess such strength and certainty as to be entitled to be described by these terms. And this is in entire accordance at once with sound philosophy and ordinary experience. Philosophers are accustomed to speak of probable as distinguished from demonstrative evidence, and indeed to divide all evidence into the two branches of probable and demonstrative, not intending to convey the idea that probable evidence does not sufficiently prove a proposition, and impose upon men a valid obligation to believe and act upon it, but merely that, from the nature of the subjects with which it is conversant, it does not produce the same kind or degree of certainty as that which is called demonstrative does. Demonstrative evidence applies only to necessary truth, as it is called, to abstract ideas or conceptions; and it is only of these subjects that demonstration, strictly so called, is predicated. Contingent truths can

have only what is called moral or probable evidence, which may indeed lead men firmly to believe, and impose upon them an imperative obligation to act, but which does not carry with it the same clear and commanding certainty as demonstrative evidence.

Now, the divine origin and authority of the Bible, viewed as a subject to be investigated by men in the ordinary use of their faculties, is a contingent, not a necessary truth. It resolves ultimately into a question of fact—the question, viz., Whether or not God did supernaturally guide and direct the authors of the books of Scripture in composing them, so that they are his word. The fact is established, not, like the truths of the demonstrative sciences, by a mere examination and comparison of abstract ideas, but by the exercise of our ordinary faculties upon a variety of materials derived from all the ordinary sources of human knowledge, especially the evidence of sense and the evidence of human testimony. The divine origin and authority of the Scriptures would therefore be said to rest upon probable evidence, not that the evidence is not sufficient to prove it, and to impose upon men without any special divine interposition an obligation to receive and act upon it as a truth or reality, but merely that it is not fitted of itself to produce that peculiarly full persuasion and commanding assurance which is the result of demonstration. And experience very plainly indicates that when men have only that faith and conviction of the divine origin and authority of the Bible which is just the result of the ordinary exercise of our faculties upon the rational arguments by which, as a matter of fact it is established, their persuasion of its infallible truth and divine authority does not usually seem to be very powerful and efficacious, or to produce the practical results which, in right reason, might be expected from it. Now, the Holy Spirit may, and does, seal this evidence and the truth which it establishes upon men's understandings and hearts, so as to give them a fuller persuasion and assurance of the truth than they would otherwise possess or attain to; and in doing so there is no reason in the nature of the case, as we formerly remarked, why he should not employ, for producing a full persuasion and assurance, any consideration that is really in itself, and on rational grounds, a proof or evidence of the truth which he is ready to seal and impress. This is true; and it is important that we should ever

remember that, whatever difficulties may attach to the more minute and precise explanation of this subject, this at least is true and certain, that the operation of the Holy Spirit is necessary to produce a full persuasion and assurance of the infallible and divine authority of the Scripture, and that therefore, in dwelling upon the proof or evidence by which it may be established in argument, either for the conviction of others or for our own confirmation, we should ever cherish a deep sense of our dependence upon his agency, and earnestly seek to enjoy his presence and blessing. But this general truth is not the whole of what was maintained by the Reformers when they conceded the necessity of a divine testimony to the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures, and asserted that believers had this, though they denied the infallibility of the church ; nor does it come up to the full import of what is laid down in the declaration of the Confession, to which we have adverted.

The Confession says that “ our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Holy Scripture, and our thorough and efficacious conviction that it is the word of God, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word of God in our hearts,” which implies, not only that men have not a full persuasion and assurance that the Scripture is the word of God until they become the subjects of the inward work of the Spirit, but also moreover that they have not this full persuasion and assurance until, in this inward work, he bear witness by and with the word itself. This operation of the Spirit is here called his inward work, to distinguish it from what has been called his outward work, or the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the miracles wrought by the apostles under his agency, which also afford an evidence of the divine authority of the Scriptures, though some intermediate processes of argument are necessary before, from that outward work of the Spirit, the conclusion is reached. It is an inward work of his in our hearts, and it is described as his bearing witness. To bear witness in Scripture does not always or necessarily mean to declare directly, or assert in express words, but is sometimes used in a wider and more general sense—in that, viz., of producing or furnishing materials or proofs from which, when rightly used and applied, the conclusion follows, or may be deduced. “ But I have greater

witness (μαρτυρίαν μερίζονα) than that of John ; for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me (μαρτυρεῖ περὶ ἐμοῦ) that the Father hath sent me" (John v. 36). "And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness (ἐμαρτυρήσεν αὐτοῖς), giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us" (Acts xv. 8). "God also bearing them witness (συνεπιμαρτυροῦντος) with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his will" (Heb. ii. 4). All then that is necessarily implied in the position that the Spirit bears witness in our hearts to the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures is, that he is the author or efficient cause of this conviction, and that he produces it by supplying us with the necessary means or materials of effecting it, and directing us in the application of them, so that thus the conviction is firmly and thoroughly established. This is all that the word necessarily implies, and there is no reason whatever why, in these passages of Scripture which speak of the Spirit testifying or bearing witness, or in this passage of the Confession, we should understand it in any other sense ; and especially there is no reason why we should regard it as implying that by a distinct intimation or explicit assertion he directly or immediately tells or assures any believer that the Scriptures are the word of God.

The Confession however further specifies the means or materials which the Spirit employs in producing this full persuasion and assurance—it is "by and with the word." There can be no doubt that by these expressions "by and with the word" are meant two different classes of materials or proofs which the Spirit employs in his work of persuading and assuring men of the divine origin and authority of the Bible. When he is said to bear witness *by* the word, the word is viewed objectively, as something out of believers and apart from them, which they contemplate and examine, and in which, when they contemplate and examine it, they are enabled by the Spirit to see plain marks or proofs that it came from God, and is stamped with his authority. In short, this was intended to indicate the internal light of the Bible, including its self-evidencing power, all those things in it, and about it, which, when men's eyes are opened by the Spirit to behold them, do irresistibly lead them to God as its author. It may include the whole of the internal evidence of the divine origin

of the Scriptures, everything in the Bible itself which, independently of anything we know concerning the human authors and the actual composition of it, as a matter of fact affords proof of its having come from God, and even those branches of the internal evidences which are in some measure capable of being apprehended and discerned by men who have not yet received the Spirit. For, as the leading object of this whole declaration is just to assert that a full persuasion and assurance of the divine origin and authority of the Scripture is not attained until men have become the subjects of an inward work of the Spirit, there is nothing in the construction of the sentence which necessarily or even fairly implies that those things mentioned in the preceding part of it, and there declared to be arguments whereby the Holy Scripture doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God, viz., "the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God, and the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation," though capable of being apprehended in some measure, as we shewed you, by natural men who have not the Spirit, yet being in the word, should be excluded from the materials employed by the Spirit when he bears witness by the word in men's hearts, and thereby produces a full assurance of the divine authority of the Scriptures. It is probable however, though the words do not necessarily imply this, and we are therefore not shut up to this meaning, that the inward work of the Spirit, bearing witness by the word, was intended to refer chiefly to these proofs or marks of the divine origin of the Bible which are to be found indeed in itself, viewed objectively, but which are yet not seen or discerned at all until men have the Spirit working in them, and opening their eyes. And this bearing witness *with* the word in our hearts, as distinguished from his bearing witness *by* the word, is intended to indicate the effects or results produced by the Spirit with the word, *i.e.* acting in conjunction with it upon men's hearts and characters, usually comprehended under the head of the experimental evidence. The word—*i.e.* the doctrines and statements of Scripture—produces in a certain sense these changes or results; and the Spirit produces them, acting along with the word, or using it as his instrument, he alone being their efficient cause; and by producing these effects or changes upon men by the

instrumentality of the word, and thereby affording abundant proof or materials for the conclusion that it came from God, he bears witness with the word in our hearts to the infallible truth and divine authority of the Holy Scriptures, and produces a full persuasion and assurance of this. In illustration of this assertion of the necessity of this inward work of the Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts, I refer you to a passage in Owen's *Reason of Faith* (vol. iii. pp. 330-338). Indeed, I may remark that Owen's two works on the self-evidencing power of the Bible and on the reason of faith are in reality, though not so intended, a very full commentary upon these two sections of the Confession which we have been considering—the fourth and fifth of the first chapter. There can be no doubt that the views which he has there unfolded were very much in their whole scope and substance the same as those entertained by the venerable authors of our Confession upon this subject, though in the detailed elucidation of his sentiments Owen has fallen into some obscurities, and perhaps into some errors and excesses to which the more careful and compendious statement of general principles in the Confession does not afford any countenance. The quotation is a long one, much longer than any which I have ever before had occasion to submit to you ; but it is very excellent in itself, and it is a much more valuable and authoritative commentary upon this important declaration of the Confession than any I could either discover or produce.



LECTURE XXVI.

PRINCIPLES AND ARGUMENTS OF THE REFORMERS ON THE TESTIMONY OF THE SPIRIT — BAXTER AND HALYBURTON.

IN last lecture we gave you some explanation of the controversy that was carried on between the Church of Rome and the Reformers in regard to the ground and evidence of the authority of the Scriptures, and the proof that they are the word of God, and illustrated the leading positions bearing upon this subject in the fourth and fifth sections of the Confession of Faith. The substance of all that is taught or implied in the statements of the Confession upon the subject may be comprehended in the following propositions:—1. That the formal ground or reason of our acknowledging and submitting to the authority of the sacred Scripture, is because it is the word of God. 2. That there are a variety of arguments, external and internal, whereby it is satisfactorily proved to be the word of God, and that these arguments are of such a kind as that in right reason they ought to convince unbelievers of its divine origin and authority, and constrain them to examine and study it as a divine revelation. 3. That this conviction or faith in the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures, which may be attained in the ordinary use of men's faculties upon the ordinary rational grounds of evidence applicable to the subject, does not produce or imply what may be called a full persuasion and assurance, and in this respect accords with what is exhibited in all other departments of the truth that is contingent and not necessary, and that is based upon what philosophers call moral or probable, as distinguished from demonstrative evidence. 4. That a full persuasion and assurance of

the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures is derived only from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, and of course is enjoyed only by believers. 5. That the Holy Spirit produces this full persuasion and assurance by bearing witness by and with the word in their hearts—*i.e.* that he produces and provides the materials by which this great truth is established, and enables them so to use and apply the materials as to reach and to retain this assurance that the Bible is the word of God; and that these materials or grounds of evidence are of two classes, indicated in the Confession by the expressions *by* and *with* the word—the former indicating the proofs or marks of God and his agency, which are seen in the word itself when men's eyes are opened by the Spirit to discern them; and the latter indicating those changes which are produced upon men's hearts and characters by the Spirit in conjunction with the word, or using the word, *i.e.* the doctrines or statements of Scripture, as his instrument in effecting them. All this is clearly sanctioned by Scripture, and it is fully confirmed by experience. And in this way, while in the rational evidence for the truth of Christianity and the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures, which can be maintained according to the ordinary laws of reasoning against all gainsayers, we have sufficiently abundant grounds on which we can prove to any man that it is his duty in right reason to receive and treat the Bible as a divine revelation, and to examine it with earnestness, diligence, and prayer, that he may ascertain the will of God; we see also abundant provision made for confirming the faith of those who have believed through grace, and enabling them to hold fast their profession without wavering, and to go on from one degree of knowledge and grace unto another until they appear before God perfect in Zion.

We have not yet, however, fully explained to you how it was that the Reformers endeavoured to shew that in this witness of the Spirit they had a divine testimony for their conviction that the Scripture is the word of God, and that so their faith was a divine as distinguished from a human faith. Their general principle was this, that the Holy Spirit bore witness by and with the word in the hearts of believers, and that this was the Spirit himself assuring believers that the Scripture is the word of God, and that thus they had a divine testimony or assurance, even that of the Spirit, to this fundamental truth. This, as a general

principle rightly understood, is undoubtedly true and important. But in the discussions to which this subject gave rise, the principle was sometimes misapplied by Protestants, and carried too far, so as to afford some advantages to Papists on the one hand, and to enthusiasts on the other; and then, through the errors of the enthusiasts, to those rationalists who were opposed to the testimony or witness of the Spirit in any sense. Some of those who have opposed Popish and defended Protestant views upon this subject, have gone further than was necessary or warrantable in admitting the absolute necessity of what is called a divine testimony to the truth of the doctrine, that the Scripture is the word of God, as if every one must have this before he can rest with peace and confidence on the divine origin of the Bible, and must be able to give some account of this as the ground of his assurance to others. Neither Protestants nor Papists, in discussing this subject, have always attended with sufficient care to the distinction between the evidence by which we can prove this truth to others, and that by which we may be confirmed and thoroughly established in our own conviction of it. Men need not be very much concerned with regard to the precise character, as a mere mental state, of their belief in the divine origin of the Bible, with regard to the precise way in which it has been produced, provided they are truly persuaded of it, and can give such reasons for their persuasion as are satisfactory to their own minds, and ought in sound reason to be satisfactory to others; and provided this persuasion is of such a kind as to lead them really to deal with the Scripture as coming from God, stamped with his authority, and containing an authentic revelation of his will. They are not to imagine that they are exempt from any obligation to deal with the Bible as the word of God, because they may not yet have attained to that full persuasion and assurance which the Holy Spirit alone can produce, and when they are using the Bible as the word of God, increasing in their acquaintance with its statements under the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit, having thus further discoveries opened up to them of the will of God, and being brought more fully under its practical power, they will have a full persuasion and assurance that it is the word of God, without probably making this question a subject of much direct consideration, or feeling much necessity

for giving a specific statement even to themselves of the grounds upon which this full persuasion rests.

It is certain that the Holy Spirit alone can produce this persuasion, and that he does not produce it until he bears witness in their hearts, by and with the word, by enabling them to see the traces of God's hand in the word in producing it, and of his agency upon themselves in effecting important changes through means of the word, which is thus proved to come from himself. But when they have once been brought into this state of full persuasion and assurance, and have been thereafter assaulted with temptations to infidelity—and this is really the only case in which the question can become one of any practical importance—we cannot see any reason to doubt that they themselves may have recourse to, and that the Spirit may employ for preserving them in or restoring them to a full persuasion, any considerations or arguments which really go to prove that the Scripture is the word of God, even those which may be founded partly upon the testimony of man. As some of the Reformers, in their anxiety to secure a fair basis for the assurance of personal salvation, against the attempts of the Church of Rome to involve this whole matter in doubt and uncertainty, in order that men might be led to rest in the authority of the church as the only *proof* of it, were led into the error of making assurance of personal salvation of the essence, and including it in their definition, of saving faith; so some of them have been led to speak of the necessity of a divine testimony as the basis of our faith in the divine origin of the Scripture in a way that is not very easy to be understood, or is somewhat liable to be abused. The general idea which some of them seem to have entertained upon this point was this, that in order to have a right persuasion on this matter, based upon a right foundation, each man must be able to say that he has the testimony of the Spirit bearing witness to him, without the intervention of any human testimony, that the Bible is the word of God. They did not indeed imagine that the Holy Spirit was to tell or declare this to them directly by an impression produced immediately upon their minds. This was an abuse of the principle by fanatics and enthusiasts. The Reformers generally held that there must be proof or evidence of this which the Holy Spirit enabled them to see and appreciate, and by which he produced the con-

viction. But as they were anxious to exclude from the process everything that was merely human, that depended merely upon man and his testimony, they were disposed to limit the operation of the Spirit in producing or effecting this persuasion, to the evidence that was found in the Bible itself, irrespective of anything we know concerning its human authors, or concerning its composition, as a matter of historical fact, that thus there might be nothing intermediate between the Bible itself and the proof contained in it of its divine original, when opened up and impressed by the Spirit; and that thus it might be said that this persuasion rested upon the Spirit's witness—*i.e.* a divine testimony—without the intervention of anything human. Some, labouring to explain this, and overlooking the distinction between the evidence by which the truth might be established against infidels, and that by which it might be satisfactorily confirmed to believers, were in this way led unduly to depreciate the external evidences, even for their appropriate purpose, though their argument did not at all require this, and likewise to speak sometimes as if the Holy Spirit were not only the efficient cause of this persuasion, but as if he in some way or other gave them proof or evidence of it by his agency apart from the proof or evidence which existed in the Bible itself, and in what they themselves had experienced, viewed in connection with the Scripture as the instrumental, and with the Holy Spirit as the efficient cause of it. The different distinctions upon this subject are indicated and summed up in a single sentence of Richard Baxter's, and a few remarks upon it may tend to elucidate them. It is from the second part of his *Unreasonableness of Infidelity*¹ :—

“I shall not add here that immediate witness of the Spirit within us which some assert is only sufficient, which is neither an objective testifying from without, nor an objective testifying by the aforesaid works of grace within, nor an effective testimony by producing our belief of the objective, all which I have asserted; but is moreover first, either another inobjective testimony as by an inward word or enunciation of another to our mind; secondly, or else an efficient testifying by causing us to believe without the objective evidence, or only upon this last supposed internal enunciation of his own. For these enthusiasms or inspirations let them boast of them that have them, but let them not blame me if I prove them not common or necessary to all; nay, if I prove that the former without them are sufficient testimony within us of the truth of this doctrine.”

¹ Works by Orme, vol. xx. p. 136.

Now, there is nothing that is here expressly asserted by Baxter to which the generality of the Reformers would have objected. They generally rejected what he rejects, though their language was sometimes not altogether free from ambiguity ; and they maintained in substance what he maintains, though on one point they would have been disposed to make an addition to it, which they usually reckoned of some importance. What Baxter here rejects as not comprehended in the scriptural view of the witness of the Spirit, is an inobjective testimony, as by an inward word or enunciation of another to our mind, and also an efficient testifying by causing us to believe without the objective evidence, or only upon this last supposed enunciation of his own ; in other words, he holds, and the Reformers and Protestants in general agree with him, that the testimony and witness of the Spirit is not a declaration which the Spirit makes to us, an impression which he produces upon us irrespective of any objective evidence which is in itself a proof of the truth, though it might not have been seen or appreciated without his agency. It is only by means of something which really proves that the Bible is the word of God, whether it be found in ourselves or in the Bible, or be adduced from the ordinary sources of human knowledge, that the Holy Spirit produces in believers a full persuasion and assurance of its divine origin and authority.

And what Baxter maintains and defends upon this subject is—

1. An objective testifying by the Spirit from without ; and by this he means principally, as is evident from the general scope of his argument, the miracles wrought by the authors of the books of the New Testament, and which are ascribed in Scripture to the Holy Spirit.
2. An objective testifying by the works of grace within ; and this is just the experimental evidence in the higher and stricter sense of it, the changes which are wrought upon men's hearts and characters, and which are not only accordant with what the Scripture tells us are to be expected from the influence of the truth, but are themselves manifestly traceable to the doctrines and statements of the Bible as their proximate cause.
- And 3. An effective testifying of the Spirit producing our belief of the objective, *i.e.* not only producing the materials which afford proofs or evidences of the divine origin of the Scriptures, but enabling us to see and appreciate them, and impressing deeply and powerfully upon our minds the conclusion which these materials are fitted to

produce, and enabling us also to retain and apply it. What the Reformers generally, and those who have defended their principles, would object to in the statements of Baxter, is the omission of the internal objective testimony, and more especially that branch of it usually called the self-evidencing power of the Bible. He mentions the external evidence, especially the miracles of the authors of the books of the New Testament, and the experimental, in the changes produced upon men, as these may undoubtedly be called the testimony of the Spirit, since *he* produces the materials and enables us to apply them; but he says nothing of the internal proofs of the divine origin of the Scripture found in the Scripture itself, viewed objectively and apart from the changes which it is the instrument in the Spirit's hand of effecting upon believers. Some of the Reformers would have objected to his comprehending the external evidence under the head of the testimony of the Spirit; but in regard to this matter, it seems pretty evident that in the sense, and to the extent formerly explained, Baxter was right and they wrong. We hold it quite as evident that in omitting the internal evidence of a divine origin which is found in the Bible itself, and which the Spirit enables believers to see, Baxter did not bring out the whole truth necessary for explaining and unfolding the testimony or witness of the Spirit. He has explained fully what is comprehended in the Confession of Faith under the expression the Spirit bearing witness *with* the word, but he has omitted what, as we formerly explained to you, seems to have been intended by the expression of his bearing witnesses *by* the word. It is to be observed, however, that Baxter has nowhere denied the self-evidencing power of the Bible, or argued against it, though he seems to have felt that it did not admit of being very clearly and distinctly explained to those who had not been enabled by the Spirit to see and feel it, and that therefore it was of less practical importance to dwell upon it. And I have no doubt, as I formerly hinted, that it was this reticence on Baxter's part that Owen referred to in the statement contained in the passage I referred to in his *Reason of Faith*, when he says—"Some, I confess, speak suspiciously hereon, but until they will directly deny it, I shall not need further to confirm it." It is deserving also of remark that Baxter, immediately after the

quotation above given from him, refers for a fuller explanation of his views to a work of Barmes against Spalatensis, and to Amyraldus in the *Theses Salmurienses*, and that Amyraldus (for Barmes I have not seen) is very full and explicit, when treating of the authority of Scripture and the testimony of the Spirit, in maintaining the validity and sufficiency of the internal proofs found in the Bible itself of its divine origin. Indeed, he lays down as his two fundamental propositions upon that subject—"Non aliunde certe et indubitate sciri posse scripturam esse divinam, quam ex ipsa scriptura;" and second, "Ex scriptura ipsa certissime sciri posse eam esse divinitus traditam hominibus."

These, and especially the second, viz., that the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures can be fully established from the Scripture itself, from what is actually contained and found there, though men may not be able to discern it fully until the Spirit opens their eyes, were the great truths upon this subject which the Reformers were anxious to establish, and which they held to be of great importance in their controversy with the Papists. They thought that by establishing the proposition that the Scripture evidenced itself to be the word of God, they secured two important objects—first, that they could thus shew how men's faith in the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures rested wholly upon a divine as distinguished from a human testimony, since the Holy Spirit thus produced this persuasion in their minds, using as his medium or instrument in producing it only what was his own work, viz., the Bible itself, and that thus nothing depending upon the mere testimony of men came in to lower the character of their faith as divine and supernatural; and second, what was perhaps a matter of greater real importance, that they could thus explain fully what was called the resolution of faith, or the investigation of this question, What is the ultimate basis or foundation, or first principle, into which men's faith in the divine origin and authority of the Bible resolves itself?

This was a question much discussed between the Church of Rome and the Reformers, and it is still often brought forward as an important article in the Popish controversy. Though the Papists boast much of the certainty and security of their mode of resolving faith, yet they really leave men's faith without any firm and certain basis, or first principle, to rest upon. When you ask

a Papist, Why do you believe that the Scripture is the word of God? his answer is, because the church, which is infallible, assures me it is; and if you ask, Why do you believe the church to be infallible? they usually answer, because the Scripture declares it to be so; and thus they prove the Scripture by the church, and the church by the Scripture, and so go round in a vicious circle, as logicians call it, without ever making any progress in the argument, just because they have not any one distinct and independent point from which to start, any one fixed principle on which they can rest their foot. They have made very ingenious attempts to escape from this charge of reasoning in a circle on the resolution of faith, but without success; thus, even if we were to concede to them that the Scripture did establish, in place of overturning, the infallibility of the church, as it assuredly does in their sense of the words, we could still prove that, in explaining what their faith in the divine authority of the Scripture is resolved into, they have no clear, independent, and well established ground to stand on. It was the discussion of this subject of the resolution of faith that chiefly led the Reformers to attach so much importance to the establishment of the position that the Scripture proves itself; that it is *αὐτοπιστος*; that it may be proved to come from God from what is contained in itself, without necessarily requiring argumentative support from any other quarter; and that thus it is a first principle, which, being fully established by its own proper and independent evidence, becomes the rightful basis of all subsequent discussion. When the Papists, in dealing with this explanation of the resolution of faith, alleged that they could not see any such self-evidencing power about the Bible, and that they were not bound to admit it, the Reformers contended that it was there objectively, though it could not be seen fully and appreciated, except by the teaching of the Holy Spirit; and as the question under discussion was not as to the way of establishing the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures as against men who openly deny it, but as to how believers may be satisfied and assured in their own minds,—though, as I have said, this distinction was not always very carefully attended to in the course of the controversy on either side,—the answer was sufficient and satisfactory, provided due care was taken in the explanation of the matter to distinguish between the agency of the Holy Spirit in enabling men to see

the evidence, and in producing, by means of the evidence in the Bible itself, a full persuasion and assurance in their minds on the one hand, and on the other, any such supposed agency as implied that he, apart from the word itself and the evidence existing in it, produced or furnished the reasons or considerations on account of which they believed the Scriptures to be the word of God.

Some of the defenders of the Reformation did not always keep in view this distinction between what Baxter calls the effective and the objective testimony of the Spirit, and thus afforded some plausible grounds to the Papists for retorting the charge of reasoning in a circle, in this way; by alleging that Protestants proved the divine authority of the Bible by the testimony of the Spirit, and then proved that it is indeed the Holy Spirit whose testimony they have, by the means which the Scripture affords for determining what is the Spirit's testimony. There would be some ground for this allegation if Protestants brought in the testimony of the Spirit as occupying the same place which Papists assign to the testimony of the church, viz., as being *the reason or motive on account of which* they believe the Scripture to be the word of God. But when they adhere to the great principle that the reasons or motives on account of which they believe exist, and are to be found in the Scripture itself, and maintain only that the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause through whose agency they are enabled to discern this evidence, and to attain to a full persuasion of its validity, the vicious circle is entirely avoided; a firm and distinct first principle is settled in the *αὐτοπιστία* of the Bible itself, while provision is at the same time made for the production and the explanation of that full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Holy Scripture which, in the language of our Confession, results from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts. This is a somewhat intricate subject, and perhaps, in order to its complete elucidation, would require a fuller discussion than our limits permit us to give to it. I have adverted to it chiefly because it was naturally suggested by the explanation of the import and the reference of the important statements upon this subject contained in the Confession, and because the explanations which have been given, brief and imperfect as they are, may perhaps afford you some assistance in understanding the references

to it which you may meet with in the course of your studies. If you wish to examine the subject more fully, you will find abundant materials in the work formerly quoted, as referred to by Baxter, *Syntagma Thesium Theologicarum in academia Salmuriensi disputatarum*, commonly known by the name of *Theses Salmurienses*, under the head *De Autoritate Sacræ Scripturæ*. It is a valuable work, containing a collection of dissertations upon a great variety of subjects, by the three professors of the Protestant University of Saumur—Capellus, Amyraldus, and Placæus. It exhibits however, I must warn you, in substance that system of theology which Baxter himself advocated, and which is sometimes known in this country by the name of Baxterianism, which is an awkward attempt to find a solid resting-place somewhere between Calvinism and Arminianism, and which, beginning usually in some vague notion of a general atonement, which is in reality no atonement, of a universal redemption, which is in reality no redemption, has too often led men at length to an open denial of God's sovereignty in the salvation of sinners, and to an assertion of the natural power of men to *repent* and *believe* and come to Christ.

A still better discussion of this subject than that which Amyraldus has given in the *Theses Salmurienses*, you will find in Turretine, in the second book of his *System*, under the head *De Scripturæ Sacræ auctoritate*; in two separate dissertations upon the same subject in the fifth volume of his works; and in a treatise, *De Circulo Pontificio*, in his fourth volume. In the two separate dissertations he discusses fully the respective provinces and functions of the church, the Scripture itself, and the Holy Spirit, in proving and establishing the divine origin and authority of the Bible; and in the other, *De Circulo Pontificio*, he fully establishes against the Popish mode of resolving faith the charge of a vicious circulation of the argument, and defends the Protestant doctrine against the Popish attempt to retort this charge; admitting, however, that some Protestant writers have spoken incautiously upon that point, so as to afford some plausible grounds for the allegation, by merely substituting the testimony of the Spirit for that of the church, as if they were causes of the same kind, and were both equally alleged by their respective supporters as the reason, consideration, or motive on account of which the divine authority of the Scripture is believed.

The principal writers of our own country upon this subject, except in so far as it is mixed up with the Popish controversy, are those who have been already so often referred to, and whose merits and defects I have already had occasion in some measure to point out—Baxter, Owen, and Halyburton. Owen and Halyburton are directed not so much against the Church of Rome, although they contain materials which may be of use also in the Popish controversy, but rather against those rationalists, as Halyburton calls them, who deny that the Bible contains within itself proof or evidence of its divine origin, and that the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary to produce a thorough and efficacious persuasion that it is the word of God. Halyburton's book contains much most valuable matter, but he has not succeeded completely in bringing out very clearly the real error and evil of the views contained in those chapters in Locke's *Essay*, upon which he chiefly animadverts, and he has certainly made some statements which go to the opposite extreme, and which require to be modified by those important principles which Dr Chalmers has illustrated as to the spiritual evidences not in any way superseding or impairing the rational, and as to the sufficiency of the rational evidences, for their own appropriate end and object, and especially for imposing upon men obligations which, if rightly felt and discharged, would assuredly lead to much higher attainments in the strength and efficacy of their faith, as well as in the extent of their knowledge and the elevation of their motives.



LECTURE XXVII.

PLENARY VERBAL INSPIRATION : ITS GENERAL NATURE, IMPORT, AND GROUNDS.

WE formerly considered the subject of the divine origin and authority of the books of Scripture; and the proofs, external and internal, by which it may be established. In doing so, we assumed that it had been proved that Jesus was a teacher sent from God, and that the apostles whom he sent forth were commissioned and qualified to reveal God's will to men; and also that the writings of these apostles have come down to us in substantial integrity, so as to convey to us a correct account of what they proclaimed to men as God's will revealed to them. Upon the ground of these truths proved, we are of course bound to believe whatever they have declared to us as coming from God, and whatever they have made known to us as to God's revelation to them, the commission they received, and the manner in which they executed it. With these materials, there is no difficulty in proving that the writings of the apostles, as well as their public instructions, were composed under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit, so that a divine origin and divine authority may be justly ascribed to them; and then upon the ground of the testimony of our Lord and his apostles, were there no other proof, the divine origin and authority of the Old Testament would be fully established. We shewed you that under the general head of the divine origin and authority of the books of Scripture, was comprehended a considerable variety of opinion as to the nature and extent of God's agency in the production of them, and the consequent character of the resulting product. Some who profess to hold the divine origin and authority of the Bible, admitting the supernatural agency of

God only partially even as to the matter of the Scripture, confining it to what they think fitted to convey instruction on subjects of religion and morality; and others extending it to all the matter contained in Scripture, but admitting it only partially in regard to the language. We explained to you something of the general grounds on which these partial and defective views of the divine origin and authority of the Scripture rested, and by which they were commonly defended, and pointed out the unreasonableness and presumption of the process of argument by which such conclusions had been generally reached, viz., by laying down the principle, that no more of divine agency was to be admitted in the production of the Bible than was absolutely necessary, and then with this principle going over the Bible and marking off what parts of it, or what classes of subjects treated of, required supernatural divine agency, and distinguishing also, according to their own views of the necessity of the case, what kind and degree of divine agency was required in order to the production of the different parts of the Bible. We shewed you also that the arguments by which the divine origin and authority of the Bible as a general truth may be established, proved, if they proved anything, a larger amount of divine agency to have been exerted in the production of them than most of these theories would admit of; and we adverted to the important consideration that we have no indication whatever, in any of the statements of Scripture itself, of there having been different kinds or degrees of inspiration employed in producing it. We intimated our opinion that the doctrine of the plenary or verbal inspiration of the whole Bible was true, and might be successfully defended; and distinguishing between this subject and the more extensive and general one of the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures, we proposed to consider this under the head of inspiration, as being that which alone seemed fully worthy of the name. So that practically the question which now lies before us for consideration amounts in substance to this, whether the doctrine of the plenary verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, or that view of the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures which approaches *nearest* to it, which stands next to it as to the kind and degree of divine agency exerted in the production of the books of Scripture, be the true one. Many of those who are opposed to the verbal inspiration of

the whole Scriptures, have professed to maintain what they have called its complete and plenary inspiration. We think that in fairness the word plenary should be reserved for the view which asserts the entire verbal inspiration; but it is certain as a matter of fact, that some who have rejected the verbal have yet professed to maintain the plenary, while others of them with greater accuracy and candour have claimed credit only for maintaining the complete inspiration. Those who profess to maintain the plenary or complete, while they deny the entire verbal inspiration, entertain views upon the subject of this sort. They think that the authors of the different books of Scripture had as much of divine guidance and assistance as the necessity of the case required; that the same degree of divine agency was not always necessary, and therefore was not given; that there were different kinds or degrees of inspiration employed in the production of the different parts of Scripture, and more especially two, viz.—first, what they call the inspiration of superintendence, when the Holy Spirit, leaving the authors generally to the exercise of their own faculties, and the use and application of their own knowledge for the words they ought to employ, merely watched over them to guard against error; and second, the inspiration of suggestion, when the Holy Spirit not only revealed to them the matter or the thoughts, but also suggested or dictated to them the words in which it was to be conveyed. When men thus admit that the whole Scripture was superintended by the Holy Spirit, so as to have been preserved from all error, while some part of it was suggested or dictated by him, they not very unnaturally allege and attempt to shew, that this is all that is necessary for leading us to regard it as the word of God, and to submit implicitly to the authority of its statements, as an infallible rule or standard, and that thus there is no material practical difference between their views and that of the entire verbal inspiration of Scripture, while their theory they allege escapes some of the difficulties to which the doctrine of verbal inspiration is exposed. It is true that there is an essential difference between a doctrine of this sort and that which denies verbal inspiration as attaching to any part of Scripture, and which admits inspiration in any sense, or supernatural divine assistance, only in regard to parts of the Bible, and not the whole, only in regard to some classes of the subjects of which the Bible treats, and not them

all. And it is true also that some of those who, while advocating these views, have denied the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, have spoken of the entire freedom of the Bible from all error or mistake, and of the accuracy and correctness which the agency of the Holy Spirit secured in some way or other to all its statements, so as to make their doctrine as to the perfection and authority of the Bible, and the respect and reverence due to all that is contained in it, substantially and practically identical, if fairly followed out and applied, with that which asserts their verbal inspiration. The question as between these two doctrines cannot indeed be said to be one of vital or essential importance. And yet even independently of the decision of the question which ought to settle the point, viz., which of these doctrines is true, which is supported by the best evidence, experience seems to indicate that there is something injurious or dangerous in any view which comes short of maintaining the verbal inspiration of Scripture. For many of those who have opposed this doctrine have failed in following fully out even their own principle, and have shewn some disposition to tamper with the reverence due to what is the word of God. And indeed it is manifest that there must be some difficulty in preserving a frame of mind pervaded by due reverence for the sacred Scriptures, unless it be based upon a conviction that it is all traceable to the agency of the Holy Spirit, and the impression that it is all traceable to the agency of the Holy Spirit, and that it really is the word of God, and not merely the word of man, must be vague, faint, and ineffective, unless it be based upon a distinct conviction that the Holy Spirit not merely superintended the writers so as to preserve them from error, but suggested to them the words in which the matter he communicated to them was to be conveyed. Still I would not have you to cherish an exaggerated sense of the importance of the special point of the plenary verbal inspiration of the whole Scripture. In some discussions which took place in this country a few years ago upon this subject of inspiration, while the opponents of verbal inspiration in general manifested great unsoundness of principle and great looseness of sentiment, the defenders, and especially Mr R. Haldane and Mr Carson, while carrying off a most clear and decisive victory in argument, perhaps overrated the importance of the precise point in dispute. The notion of what is commonly called partial inspiration, which ascribes

inspiration only to some part of the Bible, and not to all, or only to what men in their wisdom are pleased to regard as conveying instruction in matters of religion and morality, is most injurious and dangerous, for it virtually deprives the Bible of all real authority as a rule or standard of faith, and leaves men at liberty to exercise their own judgment at discretion upon all the statements it contains; and as the notion was most probably adopted just for the very purpose of securing this liberty, the privilege is pretty certain to be abused. But when men assure us that they believe that the whole Bible is traceable more or less directly to the agency of the Holy Spirit, that it has been all composed under such control on his part as to be entirely free from all error or mistake, and thus to be an infallible rule or standard, whose meaning is to be humbly, dilligently, and prayerfully ascertained, and then to be implicitly received and obeyed, and when they give any fair evidence of honestly and faithfully following out this conviction in practice, we have no right to put them in the same category as those who, in the sense above described, admit only a partial inspiration, or to represent their opinions as characterised by the same injurious tendency, merely because they see some difficulties in the way of asserting the plenary verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. When the dispute is narrowed to this point, the considerations of a general kind which bear upon the settlement of it are neither so numerous nor so weighty as when, in contending with the Socinians, the controversy is between inspiration and no inspiration, or, as when contending with men whose opinions are not so erroneous as those of the Socinians, the controversy is between partial and complete inspiration.

Still there are not wanting some general considerations which afford something of a presumption in favour of the doctrine of a plenary verbal inspiration. Verbal inspiration is that which we would wish for and desire to have in any writing which was to be the rule and standard of our faith, and on the precise meaning of which, as ascertained from a careful examination of the words of which it was composed, such infinitely important consequences were suspended. We all feel that this would produce much greater reverence in our minds in the study of the writing, and would tend to invest its statements with a higher and more commanding authority. We are not entitled to pronounce

dogmatically beforehand either that it was or was not necessary for effecting the ends which the Bible was intended to serve. But we can see, and we are entitled to assert, that some important practical purposes would be accomplished by the Holy Spirit having suggested the words as well as the matter of the whole Bible, and making known to us that this had been done. And this consideration affords at least as strong a presumption in favour of the doctrine of verbal inspiration as its alleged non-necessity does against it. And even if we were to admit this principle, that we are to acknowledge in the production of the Bible only the smallest amount of divine supernatural agency that was necessary in order to make it free from error and universally correct, it is by no means clear or certain that the application of this test would exclude the doctrine of verbal inspiration. Upon the supposition of verbal inspiration throughout, the Holy Spirit is regarded as taking possession, as it were, of the man for a time, pervading all his powers and faculties, and employing him with all his powers and faculties in exercise, and without preventing or superseding their ordinary and accustomed operation in producing a portion of what was to be received and handed down as the word of God, fitted and intended to make men wise unto salvation. Whereas upon the theory which denies plenary verbal inspiration to any portion of Scripture, the state of the case must have been this, that while in regard to some portions of Scripture, where verbal inspiration was necessary, the Spirit must have acted as above described; in regard to many other portions, some of them, these men would probably say, found more or less in every book of Scripture, He only stood by, watching the proceedings of the author whom he was superintending, ready at any moment to interfere when the author was about to fall into any mistake, either in his sentiments or in his words, and actually interfering to prevent anything of this sort just at the moment when it was about, but for his supernatural interposition, to have occurred. This is a perfectly fair representation of the place assigned to the Holy Spirit in the production of the Bible, by the theory which denies a plenary verbal inspiration, and ascribes the composition of the Scriptures partly to the inspiration of suggestion, and partly to the inspiration of superintendence. It is easy to see which doctrine tends most

to promote worthy and exalted conceptions of the agency of the Holy Spirit in this matter ; it is not easy to say which implies the larger amount of supernatural divine agency in the production of the books of Scripture, while it seems pretty plain that the inspiration of suggestion, or a plenary verbal inspiration, really implies less of supernatural crossing and interference with the ordinary exercise of all men's powers and faculties, than the inspiration of superintendence, for the purpose of guarding against any error. But, after all, the question under consideration is one of fact, and must be decided by the appropriate evidence applicable to it as such ; and the only sources from which we can get any authentic information upon the point are, either the statements of Scripture, if there are such, bearing directly upon this topic, or the Scripture viewed as a whole, and by its general character and complexion, as well as by its specific features, indicating something concerning its origin and composition. The first of these sources is much the most satisfactory and authoritative, because as the divine commission of the authors of the books of Scripture, and even the truth and accuracy of all its statements, are admitted by those with whom we are at present arguing, its authority must be conclusive upon the question, if it has indeed afforded any materials for deciding it ; while mere inferences from the general characteristics of Scripture must be liable to great uncertainty.

Before proceeding however to consider what materials there are in Scripture for deciding this question, we must explain somewhat more fully what we mean by the entire verbal inspiration of Scripture, and what it is that we really mean to maintain and defend. The verbal inspiration of Scripture implies in general that the words of Scripture were suggested or dictated by the Holy Spirit, as well as the substance or the matter, and this not only in some portions of Scripture, but through the whole ; not only when it communicates to us information about matters which the human authors of the books could not have known at all without a supernatural divine revelation, but also when it tells us of matters of which they might have acquired some knowledge, in the exercise of their natural faculties, and in the improvement of their ordinary opportunities ; not only in those portions which may appear to treat more directly and formally of religious and moral subjects, but in

all, even the historical narratives. We have, however, two or three observations to make in illustration of the meaning and import of this position, before we proceed to advert to the scriptural evidence on which it is based.

1. The doctrine of the plenary verbal inspiration does not by any means imply that everything stated in Scripture proceeded from the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit. There are some things recorded in Scripture, especially speeches and letters, which were not themselves the result of any supernatural agency. The doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration implies that the author of the book of Scripture, where they are recorded, was guided by the Holy Spirit to record them, and that under this divine guidance he has recorded them correctly. Whether the sayings or speeches and letters recorded in the Scriptures were themselves inspired or not, must be decided by evidence derived from some other source than the mere fact that they are recorded there, even though it be believed that the recording of them is to be ascribed to the inspiration of the Spirit. We have the sayings of bad as well as good men recorded in the sacred Scriptures; and even in regard to the sayings of good men recorded there, we are by no means shut up to the conclusion that because the Holy Spirit has recorded them, therefore he originally inspired them. The truth is that, in regard to the sayings of good men recorded in Scripture, we must judge of them upon the same principles by which we judge of their actions, endeavouring to ascertain, from the general principles set forth in Scripture, and from the particular circumstances of the case, whether or not they were in accordance with the mind and will of God, and said or done under the immediate guidance of the Spirit. It is certain, for example, that some of the statements of Job and of his friends in their conference with him were erroneous, and indicated a wrong state of mind and feeling. We know this from the express declaration of God himself, and we cannot therefore ascribe them all to the inspiration of the Spirit, although it may nevertheless be true that he has correctly recorded them, and has done so for our instruction, and in order that we may derive from them some benefit. If Paul had been guided to record what Peter probably said to him in defence or in palliation of his conduct, when Paul withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed, this

would have had no more right to be regarded as inspired, and should no more have been traced to the agency of the Spirit, than the conduct itself, which we know to have been wrong. There may be some cases in which it may not be easy to determine with certainty whether sayings and speeches recorded in Scripture were free from all error in fact or in sentiment. But this is nothing more than is exhibited in regard to some of the *actions* of good men recorded there. Some persons, for example, have been disposed to defend as unobjectionable the conduct of Abraham in saying that Sarah was his sister, because there was a sense in which, according to a then prevalent mode of speaking, it was true; while most commentators have condemned it as intended to deceive, and therefore inconsistent with the plain rules of duty which the word of God contains. There has been a difference of opinion among commentators as to the warrantableness and the innocency of Paul's conduct recorded in Acts xxiii. 6, 7, some holding that it lay within the limits of legitimate prudence and dexterity, and others that it did not, but partook somewhat of the character of an equivocal artifice. The inspiration of the Scriptures is not affected by these doubts or difficulties about some of the actions of good men recorded there, and neither is it affected by similar doubts or difficulties in regard to some of their sayings or speeches, which are also recorded without any very certain intimation being in all cases given to us as to whether the sayings and speeches were themselves suggested by the Holy Spirit, and in all respects accordant with God's will. One of the most important of the cases to which this difficulty has been applied is the case of the speech of Stephen, recorded in the seventh chapter of the Acts. Some statements occurring in this speech, which are at variance with the fuller narrative of the same events contained in the books of Moses, have led some commentators to suggest, as the best way of getting over the difficulty, that we are not bound to admit that this speech, though recorded by the Spirit for our instruction, was originally dictated or inspired by him, and that therefore Stephen may have fallen into some historical mistakes. But it seems very plain from the whole narrative that the speech was inspired, and that therefore some other means must be taken of reconciling the discrepancies, which indeed can without any great difficulty be explained. Some of the opponents of plenary

inspiration have represented it as implying the truth of this proposition, and as indeed resolvable into it, "that whatever is contained in the Bible is religion, and was revealed by God;" and some currency has been given of late to this misrepresentation among a certain class, in consequence of its having been brought forward and urged by Coleridge in his *Confessions*. It is however a very gross and palpable misrepresentation. No advocate of plenary verbal inspiration ever maintained that whatever is contained in the Bible is religion, and was revealed by God. No man can prove that the doctrine of verbal inspiration requires them in consistency to maintain this or anything like it; and indeed the distinction above explained upon this point is so plain as at once, when merely stated, to commend itself to every man's understanding.

2. We remark, in the second place, that when we maintain that the Scripture is the word of God, dictated throughout by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this does not imply, and is not understood as implying, that it is not also the word of man. Every one of the books which compose the Bible had a human author, who composed it, and who in composing it exercised his ordinary natural powers and faculties. We know this as a matter of historical fact, proved by the usual appropriate evidence, and we know it from what appears plainly and palpably upon the face of the Scripture itself. It has never been denied that the writings which compose the Scriptures are characterised by the obvious individual peculiarities of their authors in point of style, expression, and manner. There is an obvious diversity of style in the different books which compose the Bible, just as there is in the writings of other authors who had no divine assistance, no supernatural inspiration; and these differences, just as in the case of ordinary authors, can be in some measure traced to and explained by what we know of the general character of the author, and even of his outward circumstances, the opportunities he enjoyed, and the influences by which his natural character may have been formed. All this is true as a matter of fact, and cannot be reasonably disputed. It affords, beyond all question, abundant ground for the inference, that the books of Scripture are, and may be called, the works or productions of the human authors whose names they bear, inasmuch as it shews that in the composition of these books

their ordinary powers and faculties were not in abeyance, were not superseded or excluded, but were exercised. This fact has been strongly founded upon as an argument against the plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture; and if the fact does disprove it, the question is ended, for the fact cannot be reasonably doubted. As an objection to the verbal inspiration it will be afterwards adverted to. We refer to it at present simply for the purpose of impressing upon you the consideration that in maintaining that the Scripture is the word of God, as having been all suggested or dictated by the Spirit, we do not mean to deny that it is also the word of men, composed by them in the exercise, and not in the abeyance, of their ordinary natural powers. The defenders of verbal inspiration maintain that, in one sense or respect, the Scripture is wholly the word of God, and that in another sense or respect, though just as truly and really, it is wholly the word of man; whereas all who deny the verbal inspiration are shut up, in consistency, to the necessity of making statements which clearly imply in substance that the Bible is partly the work of God and partly the work of man, but not wholly the work of either. This is an important consideration as affecting the real meaning of the discussion, and the right statement of the question, and it ought not to be forgotten.



LECTURE XXVIII.

NATURE OF PLENARY INSPIRATION—EXAMINATION OF 2 TIMOTHY III. 16.

3. **WE** remark, in the third place, that in asserting the plenary verbal inspiration of the Scripture, we advance nothing, and we make no positive assertion, as to the way and manner in which the Holy Spirit operated upon the minds of the authors in the production of these works, which may be said to be at once his and theirs. We have nothing explicit revealed to us in Scripture upon this point, and we have no other certain means of knowing it. The Scripture, we think, gives us some information about the inspiration of the writings, but not about the kind or degree of the inspiration of the writers. It is, as Dr Chalmers says, about the character of the product, not the mode of the production, that the Scripture gives us information; and it is this only that we are concerned to know. The opposers of verbal inspiration always run off into discussions about the inspiration of the authors, or the way and manner in which the Holy Spirit operated upon their minds in the production of the books. Their grand principle is the invention or fabrication of different kinds or degrees of inspiration; in other words, of different ways or modes in which he secretly operated upon their minds, and the application of these inventions to the different portions of Scripture which they conceive them to suit. They discuss these topics as if they were familiar with them, although neither the Spirit nor the authors on whom his operation was exerted have given us any information upon the subject. Some seem to think (and Dr Chalmers seems to have had some impression of this sort) that the doctrine of verbal inspiration implies a theory in regard to the modes of the

Spirit's operation upon the minds of the authors of the Scripture, and being justly jealous of any theorising upon this subject, seem to hesitate about explicitly asserting the plenary verbal inspiration, as if this too, as well as the other doctrine, was asserting a particular theory about the mode of the Spirit's operation. This however is a misapprehension. Not only do the defenders of verbal inspiration reject the different kinds and degrees of inspiration which have been invented without warrant from Scripture or the necessity of the case, but they do not, properly speaking, hold anything, or lay down any assertion as to the mode of the Spirit's operation. Their fundamental, and indeed their only position upon this subject is, that the Scriptures, the sacred writings, as to the words as well as the matter, were given by inspiration of God. As to the way and manner in which the Spirit operated upon the minds of the authors we say nothing, because we know nothing, beyond this, that holy men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. It is true indeed that among the different kinds or degrees of inspiration which have been invented by the opposers of verbal inspiration, one is called the inspiration of suggestion; and this is supposed by these men to have been put in operation when the Holy Spirit intended to dictate the words, as well as the matter; and as we hold that this applied to the whole of the Scripture, it may seem at first view as if we adopted one of their theories as to the mode of the Spirit's agency upon the authors. But this is a misconception. The true state of the case is this—We maintain that all Scripture, the whole of the writing, is inspired as to the words as well as the matter. This is our position, which we undertake to establish from the Scripture. We maintain this, and we maintain nothing else. Oh! but, say those who differ from us, that is the inspiration of suggestion; we hold that too, in regard to some parts of Scripture; but we think that this mode of the Spirit's operation does not apply to the whole, and that some of it was composed under a different mode of operation, and by the Spirit's exerting a lower degree of influence upon the minds of the authors, which we have called by the name of the inspiration of superintendence. Now, to this we answer, we know nothing of different kinds or degrees of inspiration; we are told nothing of the mode of the Spirit's operation in Scripture, and we see no plain traces of a diversity of modes of operation upon the face of the

Bible. You may invent different kinds and degrees of inspiration if you choose, and call them by what names you like ; but we adhere to our own position, which respects primarily and principally not the authors, but the books. We maintain that the writings are plenarily and verbally inspired by God ; and we think we can establish this from the statements of the Scripture itself ; and if so, this will overturn all your theories about the mode of the Spirit's operation. The truth is, that the defenders of plenary verbal inspiration give themselves no concern with these theories about the mode of the Spirit's operation, and advert to them only when the discussion is forced upon them by their opponents. The doctrine of verbal inspiration does not require, and indeed does not admit of, these theories ; and what it is specially important to notice, the doctrine which denies verbal inspiration cannot do without them. For what is necessarily involved in the denial of verbal inspiration to the whole Bible ? Why, manifestly this, that some mode of operation upon the part of the Holy Spirit *different* from that by which it is admitted that those parts of the Bible which were inspired as to the words were produced, must be supposed as having been exhibited in the production of those parts of the Bible to which verbal inspiration does not apply. However averse men may be to the investigation of these different theories as to the mode of the Spirit's operation, however much they may disrelish the whole subject, it is evident, upon a careful examination, that there is really no way in which we can entirely get quit of them, except by unequivocally asserting the doctrine of the plenary verbal inspiration of the books. The defenders of the plenary verbal inspiration, but they alone, have always appreciated and maintained the great principle of the distinction between the inspiration of the books and the inspiration of the authors ; and, on the other hand, this distinction, when clearly seen and fully carried through, naturally and obviously leads men to assert the plenary verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, except, perhaps, when some fragment of the notion of different kinds or degrees of inspiration, as exerted upon the authors, still continues, it may be unconsciously, to cleave to them.

These three observations not only serve to explain what is the true meaning and import of this doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration, what is the real nature of the position we occupy in main-

taining it, but also to answer *some* of the objections by which the doctrine has been assailed, as you will see plainly upon reading what has been written upon the other side. We proceed now to advert to the direct Scriptural evidence in support of it. And here it will at once occur to you that the great leading proof, the *locus classicus*, as critics commonly say, upon this subject, is the declaration of the apostle in 2 Tim. iii. 16. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine," &c. The Greek is *πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος πρὸς διδασκαλίαν*. In examining critically into the meaning of any portion of the word of God, the first thing to be done is to ascertain as exactly as possible what is the true text or reading, what were the actual words that proceeded from the original author, *i.e.* that if there be various readings derived from the recognised legitimate sources of various readings, and not from mere conjecture, we try to ascertain which is the right one. In this passage there *is* a various reading which is not unimportant in its bearing upon the sense. There is one MS. which omits the *καὶ* between *θεόπνευστος* and *ὠφέλιμος*, and there are two or three of the ancient versions which seem to have been translated from a text where the *καὶ* was wanting. All the known MSS. however, except one, have the *καὶ*; and this, according to the universally acknowledged principles applicable to the settlement of these matters, is a sufficient and conclusive proof that it ought to stand as part of the text, and to be received as part of the apostle's declaration. The words *πᾶσα γραφή* literally mean *every writing*, but it is well known that *γραφή* and *γραφαί* are frequently used in the New Testament in a peculiar or appropriated sense to describe the sacred writings; and from the immediately preceding context, where Paul was speaking of the *ἱερά γραμματα*, or sacred writings, which Timothy had known from his youth, there is every reason to believe that *γραφή* is used here in this peculiar or appropriated sense, and that the apostle having in the preceding verse spoken of these sacred writings as able to make men wise unto salvation, proceeds in the verse before us to give some further information as to their origin, character, and object. It has indeed been alleged that since *γραφή* here wants the article, since it is *πᾶσα γραφή*, and not *πᾶσα ἡ γραφή*, it must be taken in its general or inappropriated sense, and mean just any writing. It is true that in most of

the cases in which the word, either in the singular or in the plural, is applied in the New Testament in its appropriated sense to the sacred writings, it has the article attached to it. But this usage is not universal. There are several cases, four at least besides this, where it is used in its appropriated sense, without the article; and the evidence in this case, both from the preceding and succeeding context, in favour of the appropriated sense, is so strong that we must have been constrained to admit it *here*, even though a different usage about the article had been more uniform than it is. The next point to be ascertained, and the only point of difficulty in the passage, so far as the grammatical construction as distinguished from the meaning of the words separately is concerned, is this, whether *θεόπνευστος* be a predicate or a part of the subject of the sentence, *ὠφέλιμος* being thus left as the only predicate, *i.e.*, whether the apostle here declares that all Scripture is *θεόπνευστος* and *ὠφέλιμος*, as it is translated in our version, or only that all inspired Scripture is useful. All the opponents of inspiration, and some of its friends, adopt the latter construction, making the subject of the proposition to be *πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος*, and the only formal predicate to be the assertion of its usefulness for the purpose specified. This construction is forced and awkward, attended with considerable difficulties, and required by none of the established rules of the syntax of the Greek language in general, or of the New Testament in particular. Could the *καί* be got quit of, this would indeed manifestly be the right construction, and some Socinians have laboured to effect this; but upon all acknowledged critical principles it must stand as a part of the text, and standing there, its natural and obvious use is to connect together *θεόπνευστος* and *ὠφέλιμος* as two different predicates of the one subject, *πᾶσα γραφή*. This construction too requires that *γραφή* must be taken in its general or inappropriated sense as meaning merely a writing, as well as that the *καί* be slurred over as meaning "even or also," thus manifestly burdening or cumbering the sentence. Upon this construction the translation of the statement would be this, "all divinely inspired writing, or every divinely inspired writing, is also useful for doctrine," a declaration which conveys very little information, and is indeed little better than a mere truism, and does not at all accord with the manifest object of the apostle, as indicated by the preceding context and the connection of the statement.

Those critics who support the doctrine of inspiration, and reckon this passage a proof of it, but who yet regard *γραφή* as used here in its inappropriate sense, and *θεόπνευστος* as not a predicate, but merely a part of the description of the subject *γραφή*, bring out a testimony for the inspiration of the Scriptures in this way. They virtually abandon the notion they had previously asserted of *γραφή* being here used for writing in general, and admit that it is in some way or other appropriated by the connection to the sacred writings. Dr Pye Smith, who has adopted this construction, explains this point in this way:—

“It is evident that the apostle in ver. 16 resumes distributively what he had before advanced collectively, so that every writing divinely inspired (for that he contends is the correct translation) is a description by which the apostle designates each and every one of the writings comprised under the well understood collective denomination *τὰ ἅγια γράμματα*, the holy writings mentioned in the preceding verse.”¹

A statement which seems in substance, so far as it is intelligible, to be just an admission that by the preceding context, *γραφή* is tied down, in spite of the authority which he ascribes to the alleged rule about the absence of the article, to its appropriated meaning of the sacred writings, thus admitting that the word *γραφή* is used here in its appropriated meaning, but still being disposed to regard *θεόπνευστος* as a part or attribute of the subject, and not as a predicate, he would translate it in this way, “all Scripture being divinely inspired, is also useful,” &c., where the inspiration of the whole of Scripture is assumed, if not expressly asserted. And to this translation there is no very material objection, though it is, we think, very evident that it is not the most natural and obvious construction; that the *καί* translated *also* is not only useless but awkward; while there is a difficulty in the necessity of providing two different supplements, one for *θεόπνευστος* and a different one for *ὠφέλιμος*, in place of merely supplying the substantive verb with *θεόπνευστος*, as a predicate coupled by *καί* with the other predicate *ὠφέλιμος*. Upon the whole, we see no ground whatever for doubting, and we are firmly persuaded, that our common translation is the correct one, and that the assertion of the apostle is, that all Scripture, meaning thereby *at least* all the Old Testament (we say *at least*, for some have contended, upon grounds not destitute

¹ *Scripture Testimony*, vol. 1. p. 33, 3d edition; 4th edition, p. 23.

of plausibility, that it may comprehend also the New), is θεόπνευστος, and useful for doctrine. It is well that Dr Pye Smith should make the admission (p. 34) that "this passage, though we adopt the construction of θεόπνευστος, which Socinians generally approve, furnishes the strongest testimony to the inspiration of all the books recognised by Paul as the sacred writings;" but we rejoice to think that this great truth, as here taught, rests upon a clearer and safer foundation than his construction of γραφή and θεόπνευστος seems capable of affording. Some minds are apt to be tempted and led astray by the appearance at once of ingenuity and candour in conceding a point to an adversary, and then shewing how, notwithstanding the concession, the truth can be maintained. This may sometimes be useful and expedient in ordinary controversy; but in a case of this sort the only proper question is, What is the right construction of the words? What is the real meaning and import of the statement? And we have no doubt that here, upon a fair examination of the passage, and according to the soundest principles of grammatical construction, there is abundant and satisfactory ground for the conclusion that the construction exhibited in our translation is the right one, and that the apostle here explicitly asserts that all Scripture is θεόπνευστος. But the most important question still remains, viz., what is the meaning of this assertion, what is it that is here affirmed of all Scripture? This of course leads to a consideration of the meaning of the word θεόπνευστος. The word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, and its meaning therefore cannot be ascertained by an examination of parallel passages, which is usually the best and most certain way of ascertaining the meaning of words. Its etymological meaning however is very plain, and quite sufficient to bring out and to establish the general idea attached to it. It literally means *God-breathed*, or divinely breathed. It has indeed been suggested that the word may be understood actively as well as passively, and may mean *God-breathing*, i.e. full of God, and exhibiting him throughout. This is true of the Scriptures, but it is not the truth taught here, for it has been fully proved that both the ordinary analogy of such compound words, and the connection and object of the statement, require that it be here translated *God-breathed*, divinely breathed, or as it is in our translation, "given by inspiration of God." Now, this of course means in general that

the Scriptures are to be traced to the agency of God's Spirit, that to his operation they owe their existence. This is admitted to be implied in the declaration by all who acknowledge that *θεόπνευστος* is here predicated directly or by implication of the Scripture. And many would have us to rest in this general averment, as if nothing more was involved in it, and nothing more could be fairly deduced from it. This, however, appears to be refusing to make a right use and a full application of what the apostle has told us. We cannot dwell upon this important statement, or seek to form a clear and definite conception of what it really means and was intended to teach, without seeing that it implies or involves, not indeed *more* than has been stated above, but that it implies or involves that position in a more distinct and definite form. Let it be observed, that in accordance with the important principle already explained, it is not the authors of the books of Scripture that are here spoken of, but the books themselves, that it tells us nothing of the kind or mode of the operation of the Holy Spirit upon their minds, by which these books were produced, but of the origin and character of the books themselves. And what does it tell us of the books? That they were breathed or inspired by God, that is, that they were produced by the agency of the Spirit, just as man's words are produced by him, through his breathing, and in the exercise of his ordinary organs of speech. The Scripture here spoken of, and referred to the inspiration of God as its cause, consists wholly of words. The words wholly make or constitute it. The Scripture in a certain sense is words, and nothing but words, and therefore everything predicated of the Scripture naturally and obviously must be held to apply to the words which compose it. This is the natural and obvious meaning of every such assertion; and if any other meaning or reference be attached to it, good and sufficient reasons must be adduced why this, the natural and obvious meaning, must be departed from, and a different meaning and reference of the statement must be produced and established by satisfactory evidence. It was the Scripture, and not the contents or substance of it, not the truths or sentiments conveyed by it, or the facts narrated, but the Scripture, that was divinely inspired; and what distinct meaning can we attach to this statement, unless we admit that the Scripture as it stands, composed wholly of words, the words which make it up, is

to be traced to the agency or operation of the Holy Spirit. Had the statement of the apostle been that the men who composed the Scripture were in composing it inspired by God, or the subjects of a divine breathing or infusion, and we had no further information about the matter, this would have left the subject in a somewhat vague and indefinite form, and would not have compelled us to adopt any very specific conclusion either as to the nature of his agency or the consequent character of the resulting product. Had this been the position asserted, there might have been room, so far as this statement was concerned, for suppositions or theories as to the extent of his agency, and as to the extent to which the resulting book was to be ascribed to his operation. But when the book itself is expressly said to have been inspired by him, this in all fairness must be held to imply that the words which constitute the book, which in fact *are* the book, came from him, were communicated by him, and are to be regarded as the fruits or results of his operation of what he did in bringing the book into existence. Inspiration, when predicated of a book, naturally and properly means this, and cannot without straining mean anything else.

The natural, obvious, and unstrained meaning of the apostle's assertion then is, that the Scripture, as it has been given to men, composed wholly of words, was communicated by God, and is to be traced to him as its author; and as it has been communicated to us through the instrumentality of certain men who committed it to writing, the inference seems, and unless some strong positive arguments can be adduced upon the other side, is, irresistible, that he guided them in the composition of it, and was the real cause and author of what they wrote, and of what has been transmitted to us under their names. It is not an inference from this position, it is the very position itself expressed in different words and in another form, that the words which compose or constitute the Scripture, all Scripture, at least the whole of the Old Testament, were dictated by the Holy Spirit, to those whom he employed as his instruments in committing them to writing, and transmitting them to us. As this is the natural and obvious meaning of an assertion of inspiration by God applied to a writing and not to the author, then if any one deny that this is its actual and intended meaning, he must take upon himself the burden of proof, and produce evidence of the truth of his assertion.

He must first establish the *necessity* of deviating here from what is the proper literal meaning of the words as they stand, and he must then explain how, in accordance with the ordinary usage of language, they admit of a different meaning. Attempts of this kind accordingly have been made, though we have not met with any which we regard as successful. When an interpretation is proposed for any scriptural statement which involves a plain deviation from the natural, obvious literal meaning of the words, the necessity and propriety of the deviation are usually established either by arguments drawn from the context or from some other passages of Scripture, which are alleged to necessitate the deviation, and to require the interpretation proposed. Nothing of the kind can be adduced here as warranting or requiring a deviation from the natural obvious meaning of the apostle's declaration. There is nothing in the context that points to any other meaning. No passage is produced from any other part of Scripture that even seems to contradict this, or to require any limitation of its natural and literal meaning. It is alleged indeed by some that the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Scripture is not true, and that therefore this passage must be interpreted so as not to assert it. But then they do not profess to produce any declaration of Scripture, which directly or by implication denies the verbal inspiration; and their only arguments consist of certain reasonings or inferences of their own, based partly upon some general features or characteristics which attach to the Scriptures, and partly upon certain notions they have devised of what is necessary, fitting, and expedient. These will be afterwards adverted to under the head of objections, but at present we only observe that they do not stand upon the same footing as passages of Scripture which seem to teach different and opposite doctrine, and thus to require a modification of this one; that they come merely under the head of difficulties, and that they are not by any means so serious or formidable as to warrant, far less require, us to put a forced and strained interpretation upon this passage, and to deviate from what is the natural, ordinary, literal meaning of the words. It has been contended by some, and especially by Mr Carson, who has rendered admirable service to the cause of truth in this matter, by his most effective and conclusive demolition of the reasonings of the opposers of verbal inspiration, that "all Scripture"

here includes the writings of the New Testament as well as the Old, not only all of them that were in existence when this epistle was written, but also all that might be afterwards added to the Canon. I am not satisfied that he has succeeded in establishing this point, though his argument is not destitute of plausibility. It is founded mainly upon a circumstance formerly adverted to, viz., the omission of the article, the use of *πᾶσα γραφή* instead of *πᾶσα ἡ γραφή*. His ground seems rather too narrow and shadowy to serve as a basis for so important an inference; and though some rules in regard to the use of the article have been sufficiently established (especially by Middleton in his work on the Greek article, to which he refers) to be made the basis of valid arguments for important doctrinal conclusions, yet the precise rule on which Mr Carson's argument is founded can scarcely be regarded as established yet. The principle or rule quoted from Middleton, if established, would indeed warrant the conclusion that if the article had been *inserted* in this passage before *γραφῇ*, this would have been a proof that the apostle spoke only of Scripture already existing; but it is a different point, and requires additional and independent proof, that the *omission* of the article proves, as Mr Carson alleges, that this reference was not confined to existing Scripture, and extended to everything that might come to be legitimately comprehended under that designation.



LECTURE XXIX.

VERBAL INSPIRATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT—MODE OF QUOTING OLD TESTAMENT—OBJECTIONS.

BUT though the doctrine of the text cannot be certainly proved from the mere words to extend directly beyond the canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament, yet it affords obvious and conclusive grounds for an argument *a fortiori* in behalf of the plenary verbal inspiration of the New. This is too obvious to require to be dwelt upon at any length. If all the Old Testament was given by inspiration of God, we cannot doubt that all the New enjoys the same privilege, is to be traced to the same source, and ascribed to the same cause or agency. Whether we look to the gifts and endowments of the men who composed it, the subjects of which it treats, its internal marks of a divine original, the purposes which it was intended to serve, and the effects it has been instrumental in producing, we cannot doubt that its origin was as lofty, and its authority as exalted as that of the Old. When God at sundry times, and in divers manners, spoke unto the fathers by the prophets, and gave his Spirit to produce the record of their revelations, we cannot doubt that the same divine agency was exerted in producing the record of what in these last days he was pleased to communicate to us by his Son. John the Baptist was greater than any of the prophets, and yet he that was least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he. Christ unquestionably promised to his apostles verbal inspiration when they should be brought before kings and rulers (Matt. x. 19, 20; Mark xiii. 11; Luke xxi. 14). And he would not withhold it from them, when under his guidance they were led to prepare writings for the permanent instruction of the church.

Paul expressly claimed the agency of the Holy Spirit as the cause or source of the words which he uttered when he said, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. ii. 13). And we cannot suppose that he would enjoy less of it when he proceeded to write under the Spirit's direction. And it is deserving of remark that in the context of the passage we have been considering, Paul distinctly identified the instructions which he had given, and was then giving to Timothy, in point of divine authority, with those very Scriptures which he has assured us were given by inspiration of God (ver. 14). It stands thus: "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures (*τα ἱερα γράμματα*) which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God; and is profitable for doctrine," &c. There are here two grounds on which Paul requires of Timothy to adhere with unshaken confidence to the doctrines which he had been taught—the first was, that he had been taught them by Paul himself, "knowing of whom thou hast learned them;" and the second was, that they were all based upon and confirmed by the Scriptures of the Old Testament, which had been all given by inspiration of God. And of course the only ground on which he could have been justified in thus putting the authority of his own instructions upon a level with those of the Old Testament was, that his discourses were to be traced to the same inspiring agency as they were, *i.e.* that both as to the words and the ideas they proceeded from the Holy Spirit, as their source and author. Indeed, the two things here adduced and founded on strikingly illustrate and confirm each other. On the one hand, Paul asserts that the whole of the Old Testament is given by inspiration of God; and by claiming equal authority for his own instructions, he claims for them the same inspiration. And on the other hand, we know from another declaration of Paul's quoted above, that these instructions were communicated, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, and yet he puts here the writings of the Old Testament upon a level with them, from which the inference is

plain, that they too were composed in words not taught by man's wisdom, but by the Holy Ghost; and this relation subsists generally between the Old Testament and the New, and the arguments or testimonies by which their origin and authority may be established respectively. For the matter stands thus:—We know directly and certainly that the apostles were so guided and directed in their oral instructions as that these were to be ascribed, words as well as ideas, to the agency of the Holy Spirit; and independently of the argument which may be fairly deduced from this as a matter of fact in favour of the verbal inspiration of their writings, and from the testimonies formerly adverted to in which they put their writings on a level in point of authority with their oral instructions, we have this further consideration, that they put their instructions and writings upon a level in point of authority with the writings of the Old Testament, and declare these writings to have been given by inspiration of God; or to reverse the argument, for it is valid either way, they declare the writings of the Old Testament to be given by Inspiration of God, a statement which as applied to writings, naturally and obviously implies that the words of which these writings are composed, are to be ascribed to his agency, and then put their own instructions and writings upon a level with them, and thus ascribe them to the same source, and exalt them to the same authority.

The declaration of the apostle that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, affords a satisfactory proof of the whole of the Old Testament, and by plain consequence of the whole of the New, a proof so clear and direct, that nothing can overturn it except an equally clear and direct proof from Scripture that the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Bible is false. If this position could be established by any satisfactory evidence, then we might be brought under a necessity of trying to explain away the natural import of the apostle's declaration, and of exerting our ingenuity to find out some process of thought or some mode of conceiving of and representing this matter, by which we might understand if possible how *writings* could be truly said to be divinely inspired, while yet the words of which they were composed were to a large extent to be traced merely to the operation of men's own faculties as the source or cause. The work would be a difficult one; but when once conclusive proof is adduced from

Scripture that the doctrine of the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible is false, we must undertake it, and make the best of it, though nothing short of a clear proof of this should either lead us to make such an attempt, or induce us to doubt about the sufficiency of the proof in favour of the plenary verbal inspiration of the Scripture derived from the natural, obvious, literal meaning of the apostle's declaration.

Before proceeding to answer the objections that have been adduced against the plenary verbal inspiration of the Scripture, or the proof that has been adduced that the doctrine of verbal inspiration is false, and that therefore some strained and far-fetched interpretation must be found for the apostle's declaration that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God—for this, as has been proved, is the proper logical position which the argument of our opponents upon this question ought to assume—we must advert for a little to a very interesting and important confirmation of the apostle's doctrine, founded upon the use which Christ and his apostles actually made of the Old Testament Scriptures, the way in which they used, treated, and dealt with their statements. We have repeatedly had occasion to advert to the testimony borne by Christ and his apostles to the divine origin and authority of the Old Testament, but we entered into no details upon this subject, because from a conviction that their mode of dealing with the Old Testament and its particular statements not only proved its divine origin and authority in some general and inferior sense, but moreover established its plenary verbal inspiration, we reserved a more particular notice of this topic till the stage at which we have now arrived. We do not mean however to dwell upon it at much length, because the subject, though very interesting and important, is not attended with much difficulty as a matter of speculation, and because you can easily prosecute the investigation of it for yourselves. The general subject indeed of the application made of the Old Testament statements by the writers of the New is one of great importance, and attended with considerable difficulty, but this we are not called at present to consider. Much is to be learned from a general survey of the references to and quotations from the Old Testament by our Saviour and his apostles concerning the general character of the books of the Old Testament as a collection of writings which stand out from all

others, and to which a divine origin and divine authority are manifestly ascribed. But at present we have to do only with these applications of the Old Testament by our Saviour and his apostles, which indicate that they regarded it as verbally inspired. Not to dwell upon general declarations of Christ himself about the Old Testament, which in their fair construction imply almost as clear and explicit an assertion of the verbal inspiration of the Old Testament as that declaration of the apostle which we have illustrated, such as "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled," "the Scripture cannot be broken," &c., we would especially direct your attention to two classes of passages as bearing upon the subject of verbal inspiration—First, those in which Christ and his apostles manifestly base an argument upon the precise words employed in the quotations they adduced from the Old Testament. This we find they did in many cases, and this affords a proof that they reckoned the Old Testament verbally inspired. We need not occupy your time with quoting examples; you will find the subject fully illustrated, and examples adduced, in Haldane and Gaussen on inspiration, and you ought to notice this and trace it out in examining the quotations from the Old Testament in the New.

The second class of passages to which we referred is that which exhibits the different ways in which Christ and his apostles introduce the authors of the statements they quote from the Old Testament. The substance of their practice upon this point is this—sometimes they refer the statements they quote from the Old Testament directly to God alone as the author; and sometimes, without mentioning God at all, they ascribe the statements to Moses, David, Isaiah, &c. Sometimes they ascribe the statements they quote to God speaking by the prophet, or by a particular prophet whose name they specify, and sometimes they ascribe them to the author whom they name speaking by the Holy Ghost or in the Spirit. We have all these different modes of referring to the authors of the statements of the Old Testament employed by Christ and his apostles, and employed to all appearance indiscriminately. And what are the inferences in regard to the real character, cause, origin, source of the books of the Old Testament, to which this remarkable practice seems plainly to lead?

Manifestly these, that these books are the word of God, and that they are also the word of man; that in one sense and in one aspect they are wholly God's word, and in another wholly man's; that God had so much to do with all of them that they are his, and that their human authors had so much to do with all of them that they are theirs. Now, if this be so, then we are shut up to the conclusion that the Bible was verbally inspired. For we formerly shewed you—and the consideration is an important one—that the doctrine of verbal inspiration, combined with the undoubted fact of the employment of human instrumentality in the production of the books of Scripture, finds its obvious and appropriate expression in the position that the Bible is in one sense wholly the word of God, and in another wholly the word of man; while any doctrine short of that of verbal inspiration is inconsistent with this position, and necessarily implies that the Bible is partly the word of God and partly the word of man, but is in no sense wholly the word of either. Any man who denies verbal inspiration can easily be shut up to this.

We proceed now to advert to the objections which have been adduced against this doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration, or we should rather say the proofs which have been brought forward to establish that this doctrine is false. The objections most frequently adduced against the inspiration of the Scriptures, taking the word in its widest sense, and comprehending the whole subject of their divine origin and authority without special reference to the subject of verbal inspiration, are taken from their alleged errors both in matters of reasoning and of fact, the contradictions and inconsistencies said to be found in them, and the supposed insignificance of many of the subjects of which they treat. We formerly had occasion to advert to these topics, viewed as objections against inspiration altogether, or the interposition of any divine agency in the production of the books, and to point out generally the way and manner in which they ought to be dealt with and disposed of. We assume now, as proved at a former stage of the argument, that there is nothing in the particular statements of Scripture, or in any general feature or quality attaching to it, which disproves its divine origin and authority in the general sense in which this is held by those who deny its plenary verbal inspiration; and the object of our present inquiry

is, whether or not anything has been adduced which should prevent us from adopting the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration—a doctrine which, as we have seen, appears to be plainly sanctioned by the statements of Scripture.

Now, you will recollect that those with whom we are at present contending, and to whose objections we are now to advert, admit that *some* parts of Scripture are verbally inspired, though they deny that the whole of it is in this sense to be ascribed to the agency of the Spirit. As they deny that those passages which we regard as asserting or implying the verbal inspiration of the whole Bible—and which, whatever they mean, manifestly apply to the whole Bible—sanction verbal inspiration at all, they base their admission of the verbal inspiration of some parts of it mainly upon the necessity of the case, *i.e.* they see and admit that when God employed man to communicate to others, and to commit to writing matters of pure revelation, of which they could not have any previous knowledge from the exercise of their own faculties, or to predict future events, especially as we find that men did sometimes not fully understand the meaning of their own predictions, the words as well as the ideas must have been communicated to them by the Holy Spirit. This certainly proves that some parts of Scripture must have been verbally inspired, though it is not the most satisfactory ground on which to rest so important a truth. It is enough for our present purpose to remind you that they do admit the verbal inspiration of some parts of Scripture, on whatever grounds they may rest it, and that therefore, for this is the practical result to which we wish to point your attention, they are not entitled to urge against us any argument or consideration which either directly or by implication would lead to the conclusion that no part of the Bible was verbally inspired. Anything they may adduce which in its fair application goes this length proves too much, and must therefore be set aside as proving nothing. If you examine carefully the arguments of those who deny plenary verbal inspiration, you will find that they exhibit a good deal of confusion and inconsistency upon this point, and that some of them, if they prove anything, prove that no part of the Bible was verbally inspired—a doctrine which they themselves profess to oppose. And you will find much valuable assistance in tracing this confusion and inconsistency in Mr Carson's very acute and masterly

exposure of the theories of the Rev. Daniel Wilson (now Bishop of Calcutta), and Dr Pye Smith on inspiration. The truth is that many of those who have written against plenary verbal inspiration seem to be influenced by some strong and not very well defined prejudice against it, to be often tempted to withdraw even the concessions which they are forced to make as to the verbal inspiration of some parts of Scripture, and to be ever manifesting, perhaps unconsciously, a sort of desire to get quit of it altogether. The origin or foundation of this feeling seems to be a sort of vague impression that, while it was quite worthy of God to reveal to men great truths which they could not have learned in the ordinary use of their faculties, and which concerned their relation to him and their everlasting welfare, it was not worthy of him to be so closely connected with many of the comparatively unimportant matters treated of in the Bible, and that if the Bible were really the word of God in any such sense as plenary verbal inspiration implies, it would have possessed a very different character from what it has; that it would have been throughout much more majestic, dignified, exalted; in short, more like God, and more worthy of him than it is. The unreasonableness of any such notions, whether secretly and unconsciously cherished, or openly expressed and avowed, is proved by the obvious analogy of God's works of creation and providence. It is true not only that every object in creation, however minute and insignificant—nay, even loathsome, and in some respects noxious—has been brought into existence, and is still preserved by the word of his power; and that all the events which take place, the least as well as the greatest, are comprehended in the great scheme of his moral government, are directed and controlled by his immediate agency; but also, moreover, that all these works of creation and providence, objects and events, were and are intended by him to make himself known, to afford the means and the materials of manifesting his glory and leading his rational creatures to glorify him, and that they are all fitted to promote this great end. His word too, which he has magnified above all his works, was fitted and intended to serve the same end, for no higher ultimate end is or can be aimed at even by God himself. It can therefore be no good ground for the belief that he was not most closely and intimately connected with the production of every part of the Bible, that it exhibits a close

analogy to his works of creation and providence, both in regard to the character of the materials of which it is composed, and the way and manner in which these materials are brought out and arranged. The Bible was intended for man's use, for his instruction and guidance, and God's wisdom in the production of it was manifested in adapting it to men's capacities, in bringing it down, as it were, to men's level; in making it similar to the other means men have of acquiring knowledge rather than in making it altogether and in every respect peculiar and extraordinary. The Bible, though coming immediately from God, or rather *because* coming from God and stamped with his wisdom, is adapted to men's powers and capacities, addresses itself to his ordinary feelings and susceptibilities, and thus when once known and received as coming from God, is admirably adapted for producing upon men all its intended effects. This might be, as indeed it often has been, fully illustrated. It is enough at present merely to suggest it.

Not only was God's word intended for men, and therefore suited to their nature and adapted to their capacities, but God was also pleased to communicate it through men, and to make use of their instrumentality in producing it. If God were to address men at all, so that they could understand his statements and profit by them, it was necessary that he should have respect to the ordinary capacities of men, and to the usual principles and laws of human language. This would require that the Bible, though proceeding immediately from God, should be in many important respects similar to other books. But even with this necessity of having regard to men's capacities and the principles of human thought and language, God might have communicated to men a written revelation of himself—a book that should make known to men the way of salvation and the path of duty—without using the instrumentality of men in the production or composition of it. He might have given his whole word to men, everything that he intended to compose—his whole written revelation—in some such way as he gave to Moses the ten commandments written with his own finger upon two tables of stone. But he has not done so. He has thought proper to employ the instrumentality of men in the production and composition of his word, and to employ them as men—first, as rational and intelligent

beings; second, to employ as his instruments men like ourselves, with all their powers, susceptibilities, and acquirements. Thus every portion of God's word is also in some sense man's word, as it has all passed through some man's mind, and been brought in some way into contact with his faculties, and with his faculties in exercise.

These general considerations (especially the two positions that the Bible though God's word was produced for men and by men, that is, for the instruction of men, and through the instrumentality of men, which might easily be drawn out and illustrated at length) seem to explain why the Bible, though God's word, is not in every respect as to its general aspect, structure, and language, so peculiar and extraordinary as some might, however unreasonably, have expected the word of God to be, and why there is so much about it that is human, so much that is similar to what we find in other books, so much that indicates man's presence, and in a certain sense man's agency. But it is just upon the indications of man's presence, and in some sense his agency, found in the Bible, that many men have based one of the leading objections against the doctrine of its plenary verbal inspiration. There is no question that the human authors of the different books of Scripture did exercise their own powers and faculties in the production and composition of them. The books contain plain traces of the personal individual peculiarities of their authors; they exhibit the ordinary diversities of style and manner which we can discover and describe in the productions of ordinary authors, who had no divine assistance, no supernatural direction. We not only see these individual peculiarities, these diversities of style and manner analogous to what we find in ordinary authors; but just as in the case of ordinary authors we can sometimes give some natural, I mean as opposed to supernatural, explanation of them, tracing them more or less clearly and directly to their mental constitution, to their natural temperament, or their acquired knowledge and habits. All this is true, as a matter of fact. It is a real feature of the Bible actually attaching to it, and intended no doubt to convey to us some information, and be a legitimate ground for certain conclusions. It has been very confidently alleged that one of those legitimate conclusions is, that the doctrine of the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible is

false. Does then the fact warrant this conclusion? There are some obvious considerations which form strong presumptions against its validity. This diversity of style and manner, this exhibition of personal individual peculiarities, pervades the whole Bible; and therefore if it afford any good ground for excluding verbal inspiration, it would seem to be adequate for excluding it from the whole Bible; while yet those with whom we are arguing admit that much of the Bible was inspired even as to the words. Farther, this exhibition of the personal individual peculiarities of the writers is not confined to the style and language, but may be traced also in their habits of thought, their modes of conceiving of and viewing the subjects of which they treat. The matter or thought or substance is admitted to have been all given by inspiration of God; and if in this which was inspired we can plainly trace the personal individual peculiarities of the writers, it would seem that the similar or analogous differences of the style and language cannot afford any satisfactory proof that the words were not also dictated by the Holy Spirit. It seems pretty plain then that there must be some fallacy in this objection, even though we could not very distinctly point it out. But there is really no great difficulty in detecting it. The objection derives any plausibility it has from a virtual assumption of this position, that the Holy Spirit *could* not employ or use instrumentally the personal peculiarities of men's faculties, habits, and acquirements for the accomplishment of his own purposes and the attainment of his own ends. Unless this be asserted, and not only asserted but proved, the objection has manifestly no foundation to rest upon; and yet surely this is an assertion which no one is entitled to make, and which no one is able to establish. We are not called upon to explain in what way the Spirit accommodated himself to the powers, capacities, susceptibilities, and acquirements of individual men in producing the Scriptures, so as to make use of their instrumentality. It is enough to know that there is no impossibility or any great improbability attaching to the idea that he may have so pervaded and guided a man in the composition of a work as that, while his ordinary powers and capacities were not superseded or put entirely in abeyance, but left in operation so as to exhibit plain traces of their presence and influence upon the work itself, it was nevertheless to be traced

both in matter and in manner, both in substance and in language, to the Spirit's agency. The impossibility of this is certainly not by any means self-evident; we know of no medium of proof by which its impossibility can be established, no contradiction or absurdity attaches to it. There is nothing about the supposition inconsistent with anything we know, either about God or man. Nay, it cannot be shewn that any great degree of improbability attaches to it. For it really is very much what we might have expected to have taken place, if God had resolved to give an accurate and perfect revelation of his will, and at the same time to make use of the instrumentality of rational men in the exercise and possession of their faculties in communicating it to us; and it is to no purpose to say that when we examine the Scriptures, and notice these features of individuality and diversity which they present, we naturally, and as a matter of course, infer the exercise and the influence of men's ordinary powers in the production of the books. This inference is sound, and we fully admit it.

A further inference, however, must be drawn in order to secure a foundation for the objection, viz. this, that since men's natural powers were in operation, so as to have in some measure affected the character of the product, and left traces of their influence upon it, *therefore* the Holy Spirit could not possibly have been making use of these powers and faculties, so far as to have regulated and determined the words they used. This inference cannot be established, and therefore the objection falls to the ground; for you must remember that we are not now in the position of just opening the Bible for the purpose of ascertaining merely from an examination of its general features, and without any other or previous knowledge of the subject, the nature and extent of the agency of God and man respectively in the production of it; but in this very different position, that we have already found in the Bible statements which, taken in their natural, obvious, and literal meaning, lead to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit, through the instrumentality of the authors, produced the words as well as the matter of Scripture; that those who resist this conclusion are bound to produce, either from specific statements of Scripture, or from general features attaching to it, clear positive proof that this doctrine of verbal inspiration is false, and that all that we are bound to do in dealing with their arguments or objections, is to shew

that they are inadequate to establish this position. I cannot enter into a consideration of all the objections that have been adduced against the doctrine of a plenary verbal inspiration. Some of them are cut off at once, and shewn to be wholly irrelevant, by the observations made in the first lecture upon this subject in explanation of the true state of the question, and of the real meaning and import of the doctrine, and of what it implies. Some, as is usual in controversial discussions, are founded on misconceptions of the views and arguments held and employed on the other side, and are apt to suggest to the mind of an opponent the idea of unfairness, or of inexcusable inadvertence. It may be worth while to give a specimen or two of this class of objections, as the consideration of them is well fitted to guard against error. And they shall be taken from authors whose general character is highly respectable, though their conduct in this instance can scarcely be regarded as fair and candid. The following passage occurs in Doddridge's *Dissertation on Inspiration*, which is subjoined to his *Commentary on the Books of the Acts* in his *Exposition of the New Testament*, and which I formerly had occasion to characterise in treating of the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures in general. It is often quoted by the opponents of entire verbal inspiration, and seems to be regarded by them as containing a very clever hit upon the subject:—

“There are other objections (against the divine origin of the books of Scripture) of a quite different class, with which I have no concern, as they affect only such a degree of inspiration as I think it not prudent, and I am sure it is not necessary, to assert. I leave them therefore to be answered by those, if any such there be, who imagine that Paul would *need* an immediate revelation from heaven, and a miraculous dictate of the Holy Ghost, to remind Timothy of the cloak and writings which he left at Troas, or to advise him to mingle a little wine with his water.”

The following passage of a similar kind occurs in Dr John Pye Smith's view of inspiration, in the first book of his great work, entitled *Scripture Testimony to the Messiah*:—

“Those well-meaning persons who think they have proved the divine inspiration of a particular sentence, such as 1 Tim. v. 23, or 2 Tim. iv. 13, (these are just the passages so facetiously referred to by Doddridge) because their pious fertility has been able to adduce a great number of important religious reflections from the advice, the request, the motives, or the implied circumstances of the case, are committing an egregious fallacy, the *non causa*

pro causa. Let them put forth the same efforts upon hundreds of sentences in the Apocrypha, or even in the Greek and Roman poets, and they will bring forth volumes of excellent moral and spiritual observations."

Now, both these passages contain very discreditable misrepresentations of the arguments of the defenders of plenary verbal inspiration. We do not lay down the position, as Doddridge insinuates, that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was needed in order to lead Paul to address to Timothy the request and the advice to which he refers. Our position is that the epistles containing these passages were all given by inspiration of God, and we prove this by arguments which are applicable to the whole epistles as they stand. It is our *opponents, and they alone*, who bring in the idea of the necessity or non-necessity of inspiration for the production of particular passages, and they apply their own notions upon this subject as the test of whether or not particular passages were inspired. They bring forward those passages, and assert that no inspiration was needed for the production of them, and that therefore they were not inspired. This is *their* argument, we have nothing to do with it but to answer it; and we *do* answer it, not as Doddridge represents the matter, by asserting, in opposition to their allegation, that inspiration was *needed* for the production of these passages, but by shewing that *their* allegation of non-necessity is altogether irrelevant, and leaves wholly untouched the arguments by which, without imitating their unwarrantable presumption in applying the test of necessity or non-necessity, we establish the plenary verbal inspiration of the whole of Paul's Epistle to Timothy. In like manner, Dr Pye Smith tells us that there are some well-meaning persons who think they have *proved* the inspiration of these passages *because* they are able to educe from them important religious reflections, and he warns them that in employing this argument they are committing an egregious fallacy, the *non causa pro causa*. Now, this appears very learned and very logical, and must surely demolish those well-meaning persons, who of course are usually very weak! But the truth is, that Dr Smith is here chargeable with a very unwarrantable misrepresentation of their argument, and I venture to say that he can produce no evidence that even the weakest of those well-meaning persons ever employed the argument which he has presumed to put into their mouth, that is, ever adduced it

as a proof of the inspiration of these passages, that important religious reflections might be educed from them. It is true that in connection with the discussion of this subject, they have shewn that important religious reflections might be educed from them; but they have not advanced this, as Dr Smith alleges, *as a proof that they are inspired*. The true state of the argument is this—We prove the inspiration of these passages from general considerations applicable equally and alike to the whole epistles which contain them. In answer to these general considerations, Dr Smith and his friends pounce upon these particular passages, and allege that they could not be inspired *because* they contain nothing valuable or important, nothing fitted to convey moral and religious instruction. A proper and formal answer to this objection of theirs is, that it leaves the direct proof we have adduced of the inspiration of the whole epistles which contain these passages untouched and unimpaired. And then, after having thus answered the objection, we commonly add *ex abundanti*, not as a part of the proper argument, or as indispensable to it, but in order to expose the blindness and presumption of our opponents, and to vindicate the honour of God's word, that these passages are not so useless as Dr Smith and his friends allege. And we prove this of course by shewing that they are fitted to suggest some important reflections, to convey some useful instruction. It must, I think, be evident from this statement of the progress and connection of the argument, that Dr Smith has here misrepresented the defenders of verbal inspiration, and that notwithstanding his parade of logic, "he commits the egregious fallacy," to use his own language, of confounding a direct proof in support of our position with the answer we give to the objection which he adduces against it.

There are, however, more plausible objections against the entire verbal inspiration of Scripture, the treatment of which is attended with greater difficulty, and these we must now proceed to advert to.



LECTURE XXX.

MAIN OBJECTION FROM VERBAL DIFFERENCES IN REPORTS OF DISCOURSES—CARSON.

BY far the most plausible objection against the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible is that derived from the verbal differences in the Bible narratives of the same event, and especially from those occurring in the different records of what is narrated as having been spoken upon the same occasion by God and Christ, and in the indications given by some of the authors of the books of human infirmities attaching to them while writing—*i.e.* of some measure of ignorance and uncertainty as existing in their minds as to some of the things about which they were inspired to write. In illustration of the latter part of this objection, it is said by Dr Hill, in his *Lectures*, part ii. chap. i., in arguing, as he does, against verbal inspiration, “Paul sometimes discovers a doubt and a change of purpose as to the time of his journeyings, and other little incidents, which the highest degree of inspiration should have prevented.” And in regard to the first part of the objection, reference is often made in support of it to the accounts given by the different evangelists of the discourses of our Saviour, in which, while there is a substantial harmony, or rather identity, there is sometimes a plain and undeniable verbal discrepancy. The objection is thus put by Dr Pye Smith: “The doctrine of verbal inspiration is attended with extreme difficulties. For example, in two or three of the evangelists, we often find the same discourse or sentence of our Lord expressed by each in different words, though with the same ultimate sense. If then we demand a verbal inspiration so as to give the exact words and order of words spoken by Jesus, in any one of these cases we destroy the

possibility with respect to the correspondent passage." Now, it cannot be disputed that here there is a real difficulty, which it is certainly not easy to explain, which perhaps cannot be fully and particularly explained ; and the proper question to be answered in dealing with it is, whether it be merely a difficulty attaching to a mysterious subject, which is to a large extent removed beyond the sphere of our certain knowledge, but which, like many other analogous difficulties attaching to other subjects, affords no sufficient ground why we should reject the evidence on which the doctrine, against which the objection seems to militate, is founded ; or whether it be an objection of such a kind as of itself, and on the ground of its own inherent weight, to disprove or to establish the falsehood of the doctrine against which it has been adduced. We may remark that the second part of the objection, referred to in the extract quoted from Dr Hill, founded upon the apostle telling us of his ignorance or of his doubts about certain matters of fact, past or future, possesses little weight, although it is the principal argument founded on against verbal inspiration by Whitby, in his general preface to his *Commentary on the New Testament*. The apostle of course was ignorant or uncertain concerning these points at the time when he wrote ; the Spirit did not at the time reveal them to him, so as to remove all ignorance or uncertainty about them ; and Paul merely describes truly his actual existing state of knowledge or impression, of recollection, or expectation. That the Spirit could not have left him in ignorance and uncertainty upon the points referred to, and could not have guided and controlled him in describing his actual state of mind at the time—and on an assumption of this the objection is based—is a position which is certainly not self-evident, and cannot be established. If ignorance or uncertainty about some of these matters of fact was not inconsistent with his enjoying, while that ignorance and uncertainty lasted, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, neither was it inconsistent with his being guided and directed by the Holy Spirit in telling the churches and in telling us the actual state of the case. The same general observation applies to those passages in which the apostle, having been compelled by the calumnies and machinations of his enemies to set forth his own claims, official and personal, to the respect and confidence of the Corinthians, gives expression at the same

time to those feelings of ingenuous shame, and of something like a sense of degradation, which self-commendation, even though rendered necessary by circumstances, could not fail to call forth in the mind of one who was animated, as Paul unquestionably was, by feelings of the most honourable and elevated kind. He felt as if he had become a fool in glorying or boasting, and this called forth something like a sense of degradation. This was his real feeling at the time; it was in no way dishonourable to him, and there was no reason why the Holy Spirit should not lead him to express it, and guide him in expressing it. The apostles stood before men in their writings, as well as in their oral instructions, in all their individuality, as men possessed of personal peculiarities of character and dispositions; and it was on many accounts right and expedient that this should be the case. But this affords no evidence that they were not under the thorough guidance of the Holy Spirit. We cannot doubt that the apostles, in their addresses before kings and rulers, indicated and expressed the feelings they entertained as men with reference to their own conduct and position; and yet we know that their Master promised them, and the Spirit conferred upon them in these circumstances, verbal inspiration.

The real difficulty however lies in the other part of the objection, the verbal differences occurring amid substantial harmony in the different accounts we have in the Evangelists of what our Saviour is declared to have said upon particular occasions. Could these different accounts have all been written under the direction, even as to the words, of the Holy Spirit? Now, in considering this, it may be observed, in the first place, that we have nothing to do with the theories which have been invented, professedly for the purpose of accounting at once for the resemblances and the differences to be found in the Gospels, by supposing that the different evangelists copied more or less fully from each other, or that they copied more or less fully and correctly from some original document or documents now lost, but to which they had access. The different theories which have been invented upon the subject, and on which a good deal of ingenuity has been wasted, especially in Germany, are founded upon a denial of the inspiration of the Gospels; and most who have indulged in such speculations deny not only the verbal inspiration of the Gospels, but their inspira-

tion in any sense or to any extent. Not indeed that the circumstance of any one of the authors of Scripture having copied from some pre-existing human document, if it could be proved that in any instance they had done this, would disprove even the verbal inspiration of their work. It is quite possible that in regard to some historical subjects there might be documents in existence which might without impropriety form a portion of an inspired history, and which the Holy Spirit might guide the writers to copy and insert in their work, adopting it as their own. There is nothing in this inconsistent even with verbal inspiration ; but it is manifestly inconsistent with inspiration in any sense to suppose, as the inventors of these theories commonly do, that the authors of the Gospels were wholly left to the exercise of their own judgment and discretion in the use they made of previously existing documents, whether these were the Gospels previously published or other writings to which the authors of all the Gospels had access. The difficulty which these theories, purely conjectural, and resting upon no historical evidence, have been invented to explain, is the resemblance that obtains among the different Gospels, the doctrine of inspiration being excluded ; whereas the difficulty we have at present to contend with is to explain if possible the *difference* which we find among them, the doctrine of their verbal inspiration being assumed ; or, if we cannot fully explain it, to give such explanations regarding it as to shew that it is not adequate to prove that the doctrine of verbal inspiration is false. Now, the main ground which is taken by the defenders of verbal inspiration in direct answer to this objection, and the only one, so far as I can see, which they could take, is this, that as it is universally allowed that it is no argument against the truth or veracity of witnesses or narrators, that their accounts, while agreeing in substance, should vary somewhat in minute details, and in the precise words in which they are set forth, so whatever is consistent with truth and veracity in men, when left to the unaided exercise of their faculties, is consistent with the agency and operation of the Holy Spirit ; that as the Spirit had resolved to employ the agency of men, and of men in the exercise of their natural powers and faculties, and of course must be supposed to have in some measure or in some sense adapted or accommodated himself and his operation to these powers or faculties of theirs, we are not entitled to say that this

adaptation or accommodation may not have gone so far, without affecting the reality of his thorough and pervading agency, as to have left room for whatever diversity in their narratives was consistent with their veracity and accuracy, as estimated by the principles by which these things are ordinarily judged of among men. This principle is established by Mr Carson in a work formerly referred to, viz., *Theories of Inspiration Reviewed, &c.*, pp. 112-117, and 90, 91.

I am very far from being disposed upon this occasion to speak with the same confidence as he does, and I cannot but condemn the tone of dogmatism and arrogance with which he has treated a subject that is unquestionably a very difficult one; but I think the important principle which he has developed, and which, so far as I recollect, has not been brought forward and expounded so fully by any other author, is a sound one, and that if it be sound, it affords a satisfactory answer to the objection. It was evidently, as we have already had occasion to remark, a part of God's plan, devised and executed in his wisdom, for conveying to men a revelation of his will through the instrumentality of men, that the men whom he employed for this purpose should stand out before those to whom their communications should be addressed, as men possessed of the ordinary powers, and exercising the ordinary faculties, of men, adducing proofs of their divine mission, submitting themselves and their communications to the investigations of men's understanding, exhibiting and referring to every ordinary species of evidence that was naturally fitted to impress men's understandings in support of their claims. It was evidently designed and intended that the first preachers of the gospel should be men who were able to bear their own personal testimony to the truth of the leading facts on which the gospel revelation was founded, and this no doubt contributed to lead men to a conviction of the truth of the claims which they put forth. It was evidently intended, that these men, in their whole character and deportment, in the general structure and complexion both of their oral instructions and of their writings, should exhibit every mark of honesty and veracity, everything fitted to impress the minds of men who heard them speak, or who might read their writings, with the belief that they were true men, who honestly and faithfully related what they had seen and heard, and what

they had been instructed to communicate. Now, these important purposes which the oral instructions and writings of the apostles were fitted to serve, and which their writings continue to serve until the present day, could not have been effected unless in the execution of their commission, whether orally or by writing, they had been left to the exercise of their own powers and faculties, and to the manifestation of their own dispositions and habits, and other individual and personal peculiarities. They could not have exhibited so fully all those marks of integrity and veracity which every subsequent age has delighted to trace in their writings, unless in those writings they had left traces of the working of their own minds, and of their own personal individuality ; unless these writings had been so far and in such a sense theirs, as to admit of a full and thorough application to them of the ordinary principles by which, on the grounds of human nature and experience, we judge of the integrity of men and the truth of their statements. The instructions of the apostles were originally addressed to men who were not yet convinced of the truth of their claims, and who of course needed to have some evidence of the divinity of their mission set before them. Their instructions were no doubt regulated by the Spirit, in some measure with a view to the object of impressing the minds of those who heard them with a conviction of their integrity, upon grounds similar to those by which the integrity of men is usually estimated. The same holds true of their writings. They come usually into men's hands before they are convinced of their truth and authority, or at least before they have fully investigated their claims ; or, at any rate, men are entitled to examine them and to investigate their claims before they submit to their authority. And in following out these investigations in an exact and regular way, they naturally examine in the first place into the veracity of the authors, and the general truth and credibility of their statements, upon the ordinary principles derived from a survey of human nature and the results of experience, which are applicable to such a question. And in the process of the investigation, intelligent and impartial inquirers will find many clear and palpable evidences of integrity and truth in the writings of the New Testament, which could not have attached to them, had not the ordinary faculties and other personal peculiarities of the men been exhibited in their writings.

In judging of the Gospels by the ordinary principles applicable to human writings, men would have no hesitation in saying that the unimportant differences which are found in the different narratives, combined as they are with substantial and pervading harmony, not only afford no evidence against the integrity of the authors and the truth of their statements, but rather tend to confirm and establish them. Now, the objection which we are considering proceeds upon the assumption that these advantages, which all admit, and which all are ready to set forth and to illustrate, exclude the supposition, if not of all inspiration, as the Socinians allege, at least of any such inspiration as implies that the Spirit guided them or dictated to them in the choice of the words they used. It is not alleged by the defenders of verbal inspiration that from an examination of the general features and characteristics of Scripture, we could have gathered direct proof of verbal inspiration. The proof of this is founded mainly upon information given us in Scripture statements, which treat directly and explicitly of this point, and which, understood in their natural obvious sense, seem very plainly to tell us that the sacred writings were inspired as to the words as well the matter. It is in this state of things that the objectors come in, and set forth, that even admitting that the Holy Spirit may, for the important purposes above referred to, and in order to secure the advantages which have been above specified, have so far accommodated himself to the men whose instrumentality he employed as to have left them to such an exercise of their ordinary powers and faculties as produced that diversity of style and manner which we see in the different books of Scripture; yet that if he really so influenced them as to determine the words they used, he must always have communicated to them the same precise words, when they professed to be reporting words used upon any particular occasion. That the Holy Spirit must necessarily have done this—must necessarily have exerted his influence in this way, that he could not possibly have controlled and directed them in the selection of the words, and at the same-time have secured the advantages which, as we have seen, result from the partial diversity, combined with substantial harmony, is an assertion which plainly savours of presumption, and which could be warranted only by a more thorough knowledge of the Spirit's work, of the possible ways of his influencing the minds

of men, and of the principles by which, in exerting this influence, he must be guided, than we have any certain means of acquiring. Is it not possible, at least, that the principle laid down by Mr Carson may be true? Does it not possess a considerable measure of plausibility? If human instrumentality was to be employed in this matter, and if men's ordinary faculties and personal individuality were to be allowed to operate, is there not some probability that they might be left to exhibit the ordinary indications of the exercise of the minds of upright men in similar circumstances? Are we quite sure that the Spirit could not have produced such a result without abandoning that entire regulation of the words they used, which it is known and admitted that he exercised in regard to many parts of Scripture? Is it quite certain that a diversity in the words employed, which would not have afforded even a presumption against the integrity and fidelity of the writers, viewed merely as men exercising their ordinary faculties, could not have been produced by the Holy Spirit, who had resolved to use the instrumentality of men's faculties in this matter, and to use them in such a way as to make the works produced contain plain internal evidences of their integrity and veracity as men? We think that this is not certain and cannot be proved, and that the opposite supposition, viz., the consistency of the verbal inspiration of the different evangelists, with such a diversity in their language as would have thrown no suspicion upon their integrity and accuracy if they had not been inspired, is not only possible, but has some degree of probability attaching to it. But if it be admitted to be possible, or rather if it cannot be proved to be impossible, this is sufficient to make it fully available for answering the objection; for the objection really amounts in substance to this: It is not possible to reconcile the idea of the verbal inspiration of the different evangelists with the verbal differences in their reports of the same discourses, though these differences would have been quite reconcileable with their integrity and accuracy as men, if a claim to verbal inspiration had not been set up on behalf of their narratives. And it is enough to dispose of the objection if we are warranted in saying, that for aught we know, it is possible that these two things might have coexisted, and even that this alleged impossibility cannot be proved.

This principle on which Mr Carson has based his answer to

the objection—the principle, viz., that whatever is consistent with truth and integrity on the part of the writers, viewed simply as men, exercising their ordinary powers, is or may be also consistent with their having been under the thorough guidance of the Spirit, even in determining the words they used—can scarcely be said to have yet been subjected to the test which the examination of a subject by a variety of minds usually furnishes; but what has taken place historically concerning it may be regarded as affording some presumption in favour of its soundness. Since Mr Carson's book appeared an important and elaborate work on the subject of inspiration has been published by Dr Henderson, of Highbury College, containing a good deal that is valuable, but decidedly opposing the doctrine of verbal inspiration. Though he refers occasionally to Mr Carson's work for the purpose of answering it, yet, in regard to the topic we are now considering, Dr Henderson just repeats Dr Pye Smith's objection, without venturing to consider Mr Carson's answer and the principle on which it rests; though it is perfectly manifest that if the principle be a sound one, it is a complete answer to the objection. This work of Dr Henderson called forth a "Refutation" from Mr Carson, characterised, I am sorry to say, by the same appearance of dogmatism and arrogance as his former work, but characterised also by the same acuteness of reasoning and the same masterly power of exposing and demolishing sophistry. As there is one peculiar feature in the objection to which Dr Henderson has given great prominence, and which he has pressed with much plausibility, as Mr Carson had not very fully answered it in his former work, and as it tends much to illustrate the whole principle on which he meets the difficulty, we feel disposed to refer you to another passage contained in his last work on this subject (p. 122).

I have referred specially to Mr Carson upon this subject, because really the argument is *his*, and, so far as I know or recollect, not discussed in any other accessible work; because I have nothing material to add to what he has said regarding it, and because the argument could not be put more clearly or more effectively than in the words he has himself employed.

LECTURE XXXI.

OBJECTIONS TO PLENARY VERBAL INSPIRATION FROM 1 COR. VII.—DR HILL.

WE had occasion formerly to hint at an important distinction in the kind of arguments by which it might be attempted to be shewn, that what seems to be the natural, obvious meaning of the Scripture testimony in support of the verbal inspiration of the whole Bible, might be overturned or evaded, and that an interpretation not sanctioning verbal inspiration must or might be put upon it. Arguments to this effect might be deduced from scriptural statements, if such there were, which taught us plainly that plenary verbal inspiration was not a quality of Scripture ; or they might be founded only on inferences drawn from certain general features of Scripture, which are alleged to afford materials for enabling us to reach, by a process of ratiocination, the conclusion that the whole Bible was not verbally inspired. Arguments of the first class would be much the more direct and satisfactory if they existed, because nothing more would be necessary than just to ascertain the exact meaning of scriptural statements ; whereas, in regard to arguments of the second class, there may be very great uncertainty about the validity of the inferences, and no clear or definite standard to which an appeal can be made for ascertaining this. The objections against the plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture which have hitherto been considered, come wholly under this second head ; and even in the brief and hasty notice we have taken of them, you must have been struck with the looseness and uncertainty of the inferences from some general features or properties of Scripture on which they are based, you must have been impressed with the conviction that

considerations of a firmer texture are necessary in order to require, or even to warrant, a deviation from the literal, obvious meaning of a scriptural declaration. If any passage of Scripture could be produced which, when its meaning was ascertained, was found to convey directly, or by necessary consequence, to us the information that the whole Bible was not verbally inspired, or that in some parts of it the authors were left to the unaided exercise of their own faculties for the words, at least, which they used, this might require us to modify our interpretation of those passages which seem to assert verbal inspiration, upon the ground of the obvious and reasonable principle applicable to the Scriptures in common with all other writings—viz., that they ought, if possible, to be interpreted so as to be self-consistent. This is a legitimate process when there are materials in Scripture for carrying it through in regard to any particular topic, and one on which more reliance may be reasonably placed than in mere general inferences from certain features or qualities of Scripture, as distinguished from particular statements which must have been intended to give us, when their meaning is rightly ascertained, sound information on the subject of which they treat. The opponents of plenary verbal inspiration, while dealing largely in inferences deduced by man's reason in the way of argument from certain general features of the Bible, do not allege that there is any actual statement of Scripture which tells us, as a matter of fact, directly or by implication, that the whole Bible was not verbally inspired. But some of them have alleged that we have in Scripture an explicit warrant for believing what amounts in substance to the same thing; that some statements contained in the Bible were not given by inspiration of God; and as an instance of this, they refer to certain declarations of the Apostle Paul in the seventh chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, in which they say he tells us that some statements which form part of that chapter, did not proceed from immediate divine influence, but merely from himself. This argument is not brought forward by Dr Pye Smith or Dr Henderson, but it is adduced by Dr Hill in his *Lectures* as an argument against verbal inspiration. He puts it in this way:—

“Paul, in some instances, makes a distinction between the counsels which he gives in matters of indifference upon his own judgment, and the commandments which he delivered with the authority of an apostle. ‘I speak

this by permission, and not of commandment.' 'This I command, yet not I, but the Lord,' a distinction, he adds, for which there would have been no room had every word been dictated by the inspiration of God" (book ii. chap. i. p. 369).

Now, in this sentence there is both confusion of thought, and misapprehension of the meaning and import of the apostle's statements. If Paul had indeed received no communication from the Spirit as to the way in which a question that had been proposed to him should be answered, he might have stated this as a matter of fact, and he might have been guided even as to the words by the Holy Spirit in stating it. There is nothing in this at all inconsistent with verbal inspiration. We had occasion formerly to refer to some of those instances in which Paul in his epistles professes that he was at the time in a state of ignorance or doubt as to certain matters of fact to which he was called upon to advert, and we shewed you that this being his actual state of mind concerning these points, there was no reason why he should not describe it as it was, and no reason why the Holy Spirit should not direct him in describing it. So here in the case before us, if the apostle had indeed received no divine communication concerning a particular point submitted to him for decision or advice, he might tell the churches this, and the Spirit, for anything we know either from Scripture or the nature of the case, might direct and guide him even as to the words to be employed in telling it. The apostle however might have to tell them, not merely that he had received no divine communication to make to them on the point in question, but also moreover that it was a point in regard to which no divine authoritative decision had been or was to be given, with respect to which God did not impose upon them any positive obligation or commandment, but which he left as a matter to be determined by themselves in the exercise of their own judgment according to circumstances. This too he might state upon God's authority, and he might be plenarily inspired in stating it, or directed and guided by the Spirit even as to the words employed in stating it. It is plain from the words used by Dr Hill in stating this objection, as well as from another objection which he adduces against verbal inspiration, and which we formerly considered, that he regarded any statement of the apostle intimating that he was at the time in any measure ignorant or

uncertain about anything of which he wrote, as affording of itself a proof that he was not guided by the Spirit in what he did write concerning it; a notion which evidently proceeds from a confusion of thought upon the subject, and which, if it were really solid and well-founded, would do something more than disprove verbal inspiration—the only purpose for which Dr Hill adduces it—would prove that in these passages he was not under the guidance of the Spirit as to the thoughts or sentiments any more than as to the words.

It is quite possible, however, that the apostle, after stating that he had received no divine communication deciding the point on which he had been consulted, and after stating moreover that the point was one on which God gave no commandment or authoritative judgment, but which was left open as a matter which they were at liberty to decide for themselves, might go on to give them his own opinion upon the subject simply as a Christian and a pastor, and not as an inspired apostle, exercising merely the liberty of judgment which God permitted to *them*, and which, from the footing on which God had left the matter, they might still lawfully exercise, even after the apostle had given his opinion on it as a Christian and a pastor. This is quite possible, and if he did so, and told us expressly that he was doing so, why then there would be good ground for the inference that the words in which the opinion given in such circumstances was expressed were not to be ascribed to the Holy Spirit. Dr Hill evidently supposed that this was the actual state of the case in regard to some of the statements contained in this chapter. Now let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that this was the actual state of the case, and let us consider what conclusions result from it. One conclusion would seem to be, that the statements referred to, containing merely the apostle's opinion, were not inspired by the Spirit in regard to the sentiments any more than in regard to the words. There can be no possible ground for excluding the inspiring agency of the Spirit in regard to the one which does not equally apply to the other; and it is therefore unreasonable to adduce this as a proof, as Dr Hill does, against the idea "that every word had been dictated by the Spirit of God." It may be a good argument, so far as it applies, in the hands of Socinians, who deny inspiration altogether, but those who, like Dr Hill, admit the divine inspiration of the matter or sentiment of the

Scripture, and profess merely to object to the plenary verbal inspiration, cannot in sound reasoning derive from it any advantage, or make it at all available for their purpose. It would also seem a fair inference that if, upon the ground supposed, we are to exclude inspiration in those passages where the apostle has expressly told us that he was not speaking under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we should admit and acknowledge his inspiration everywhere else, when he has given no such intimation. Some indeed have alleged that we should admit inspiration only when and where the sacred writers have expressly claimed it. But this notion, not to mention other grounds by which it might be refuted, plainly proceeds upon the assumption that we have no direct and positive proof of inspiration as applicable to the Scriptures as a whole, and that the question, so far as any proof of that sort is concerned, is quite open; whereas we have shewn you that we have positive proof of the plenary inspiration of the whole Bible, proof which will require very strong and conclusive evidence to invalidate it. This notion which we are considering comes up merely in the shape of an objection to this proof, and the doctrine which rests upon it, and therefore we are entitled to say that, even if the fact, admitted as a fact for the sake of argument, proves that these particular passages were not inspired, it leaves the direct and positive proof of inspiration as applicable to all the rest of the Bible untouched; so that, even if we were to admit Dr Hill's view of the meaning and import of certain statements here made by the apostle to be correct, it affords no ground whatever for any conclusion bearing upon the distinction between the inspiration of thought and of words, the only purpose to which Dr Hill applies it; and even in the hands of those who reject this distinction and deny inspiration altogether, it affords no ground for denying or doubting the inspiration of any part of the Bible except the particular passages specified.

But the most important question is this, does the apostle here, as Dr Hill alleges, distinguish between the counsels he gives in matters of indifference upon his own judgment, and the commandments which he delivered with the authority of an apostle?—in other words, are there any statements contained in this chapter which are declared by the apostle to be merely the expression of

his own opinion, and not uttered in the exercise of his apostolic authority, and under the guidance and direction of the Spirit? Dr Hill seems to assume this as a position clear and undeniable, one that required no proof; and yet it has been disputed and disproved even by men who are opposed to entire verbal inspiration. Whitby, for example, in his general preface formerly referred to, reasons ably and conclusively against it, seeing clearly, what Dr Hill did not see, though it is abundantly evident, viz., that if it proves anything bearing upon this question of inspiration, it proves that the thoughts in these passages were no more inspired than the words. The first passage quoted by Dr Hill, and the first occurring in the chapter bearing upon this subject, is the sixth verse, "But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment." Dr Hill evidently understood this as meaning that the statement here referred to, the apostle was permitted by the Spirit, but not commanded to make, and he infers from this that the statement was wholly Paul's own, and was not to be traced to the agency of the Spirit. Now, not to advert again to the invalidity of this inference, let us see whether this be really the meaning of the statement. The words are not very happily translated in our version. The word translated "by" before "permission" is, in the original, the same as that translated "of" before "commandment;" in both cases it is the preposition *κατά*, and it seems pretty evident that the use of the word "by" in our translation has tended to foster the idea that the apostle here declares that he was permitted, though not commanded, to make this statement, while his real meaning is, that in the statement he had made, he was giving a permission and not imposing a commandment. The words *συγγνωμη* and *ἐπιταγή* are well enough translated *permission* and *commandment*, though it ought to be remarked that the precise meaning of *συγγνωμη* would be rather more correctly expressed by the English word *concession*. The word does not elsewhere occur in the New Testament, but concession or indulgence is its ordinary usual meaning in the Greek language, and there is no reason whatever why it should not be understood in this sense here. The literal version of the words then is, "I speak this according to concession, and not according to commandment," and the context and scope of the passage clearly and unequivocally determines that this means *not*, I speak this because I am permitted though not com-

manded to speak it, *but* I speak this in the way of concession not of commandment, *i.e.* speaking this I am declaring or intimating a permission or concession that is left or granted to you, and not imposing a commandment which you are bound to obey.

We have said that the context and scope of the passage determine in favour of this meaning; but we ought first to observe that even the words themselves, independently of the context, are rather more favourable to this meaning than to the other; *συγγνωμη* more properly signifies concession or indulgence than permission, and this circumstance favours the meaning we have attached to them, and although *κατ' ἐπιταγην* might mean, and does mean in some passages of the new Testament, in accordance with a commandment received from God, yet we have in Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians a passage evidently parallel to this, where we have not only the words *κατ' ἐπιταγην*, but the whole phrase here employed by the apostle, *οὐ κατ' ἐπιταγην λεγω*, and then it undoubtedly means: "I do not speak in the way of imposing a commandment," and *not*, I do not speak in accordance with a commandment given to me. The passage is—"I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love" (2 Cor. viii. 8). Here there cannot be a doubt that the apostle meant to tell them that in what he had said before in enforcing upon them liberality, and especially in urging them to complete the collection they had begun for the poor saints at Jerusalem, he was not imposing upon them an express duty commanded of God, but merely stirring them up to do what would greatly redound to both their credit among the churches, and be a gratifying evidence to him and to themselves of their real attachment to Christ and to his people. As this is the only other case where the whole phrase *οὐ κατ' ἐπιταγην λεγω* occurs in the New Testament, it affords a very strong presumption that its meaning is the same in the passage before us, and there is, as I have said, quite enough in the context to establish all this. The substance of what the apostle lays down upon one of the points upon which he had been consulted was this, that he had no instructions to impose upon them any express injunction or obligation in regard to it; that God left them at liberty to marry or not as they saw cause, or as they thought most expedient for promoting their spiritual welfare. This was God's decision upon the question, to impose upon them

no commandment, but to concede to them the liberty of doing in the matter what they thought best.

The apostle laid down some things in regard to marriage as duties, matters of obligation, and imposed them by his apostolic authority; but in regard to the question whether they should marry or not, he had no commandment to give them, but was instructed to intimate that upon this point it was permitted or conceded to them to decide for themselves. This is the sense to which the general scope of the passage naturally leads, and there is nothing said in this part of the chapter which affords any ground for doubting that he was just as fully instructed and commanded of God to intimate that this point was ultimately and authoritatively settled in the way of *granting a permission or concession to men to marry or not*, as to lay down those things which he imposed as positive, commanded duties. There is nothing here then in the way of distinguishing between a counsel and a command, nothing that implies that what the apostle said upon this point proceeded only from himself, that it was merely permitted by the Spirit, but not commanded by him. The next passage quoted by Dr Hill is the tenth verse, "And unto the married I command, yet not I but the Lord, let not the wife depart from her husband;" and this should be taken in connection with the twelfth verse, "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord, if any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away." The question here is, what is the real nature of the distinction thus indicated as to the origin or the authority of these two commands or injunctions? Dr Hill evidently supposes that the one which came not from Paul, but the Lord, rested upon divine authority, and was communicated to Paul by the inspiration of the Spirit; while the other, which came from Paul and not the Lord, had no divine authority to rest upon, but was merely Paul's own judgment or opinion as a Christian or a pastor. That this latter notion is correct is in the highest degree improbable. The point decided in the twelfth verse, when Paul said, "I speak, not the Lord," was one of great practical importance, manifestly a question of principle, viz., whether or not a man who had been converted to the faith of the gospel after his marriage, should put away his wife, who still continued a heathen. It was evidently indispensable that this question should

be settled, and settled authoritatively and conclusively; and accordingly the apostle decides it, and after deciding it, shews in the fourteenth verse that important religious principles were connected with it. In a preceding part of this epistle (ii. 16) Paul had declared absolutely, and without limitation, "We have the mind of Christ," and in a subsequent part of it (xiv. 37) "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." Surely it would require statements that cannot fairly be explained in any other sense to entitle us to deny that anything in this epistle which contains such declarations as these, was not given by inspiration of God, and did not rest upon divine authority. But it is said, what other meaning can be assigned to these statements? Is it not said in the one case, "I command, yet not I, but the Lord," and in the other, "I speak, not the Lord." But there is a very obvious and satisfactory way of explaining the distinction in full accordance with the maintenance of the divine authority and inspiration of the deliverance in the twelfth verse, introduced by the second of these forms of expression, and it is so obvious and satisfactory as to afford, when viewed in connection with the grounds we have already adduced in support of the necessity of holding the second as well as the first of these deliverances, the twelfth verse as well as the tenth, to be based upon divine authority, sufficient proof that it is the true exposition of the distinction. When the apostle in the tenth verse says, "I command, yet not I, but the Lord," he refers to the fact that Christ the Lord had distinctly and explicitly settled this point himself by laying down the principle that it was not lawful for a man to put away his wife except for adultery, his deliverance upon this point being recorded in the Gospels, both in his Sermon on the Mount, and in the account of his answer to the question of the Pharisees, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?" Whereas, upon the other points introduced in the twelfth verse, the Lord had not given any deliverance while he tabernacled upon earth. Paul therefore could not appeal to his authority in this case as in the former, but he now decided it himself in the exercise of his apostolic authority, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This interpretation fully explains and accounts for the distinction which the apostle made between the Lord and

himself, without the supposition that in the twelfth verse he was merely giving his own opinion without having the inspiration of the Spirit; there is nothing either in the words or in the scope of the passage which makes it in the least improbable, and therefore upon the grounds already adduced, as making some such explanation of the distinction imperatively necessary, if the words could at all admit of it, this is to be regarded as the true meaning of the passage. We have not yet then found any disclaiming of inspiration by the apostle, any ground whatever for believing that he here merely expressed his own opinion, the result of his own reflections, without enjoying the immediate and supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. Dr Hill quotes nothing more, and of course has not produced any evidence in support of the objection which he here advances against plenary verbal inspiration.

There is, however, a subsequent passage in this chapter which affords fully as plausible a ground for the objection as those which he has quoted. In the twenty-fifth verse the apostle returns to the subject of marrying or not marrying, and makes the following statement regarding it:—"Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful." This may seem to imply that he was here merely giving his opinion as an ordinary uninspired man. But the words do not necessarily imply this, and the general scope of the passage is opposed to it. The apostle tells them again, as he had done in the early part of the chapter, that upon the question of marrying or not marrying he had no commandment from God to impose upon them, that in this matter it was permitted or conceded to them to act according to their own judgment. The subject was one that did not admit of commandment, and in regard to which no positive injunction that was binding upon individuals was or could be given. The apostle however gave them his judgment upon the subject to this effect, that though it was perfectly lawful for any of them to marry if he chose, yet that in the condition in which the church was then placed they should rather lean to the side of not marrying. Now, the question is, was the judgment he gave to this effect the result merely of his own unaided reflections, or was he guided in forming and expressing it by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? From the nature of the case it could not be anything but a judgment or

advice, whether it came from Paul alone or from the Holy Ghost, so that its being a judgment, as distinguished from a command, indicates nothing whatever as to its origin or authority. He gave it as the judgment of one "who had obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful." This plainly enough implies that he gave this judgment as an apostle in the faithful execution of his apostolic commission, and of course under the guidance and direction of the Spirit whom Christ promised to his apostles. He gave it as one who had obtained mercy to be faithful, *i.e.* who was graciously enabled by God to be faithful to the trust committed to him as an inspired teacher. We find Paul frequently speaking of the mercy or grace of God as manifested towards him in putting him into the apostleship, and enabling him to discharge its duties. He tells us that the glorious gospel of the blessed God had been committed to his trust, and the Lord counted him faithful. When he here thus speaks of his judgment as that of one who was enabled to be faithful, this naturally suggests the idea that he delivered it as a steward of the mysteries of God, as one who enjoyed in this matter supernatural communications of divine grace, and who acted under their influence; and there is nothing whatever either in the words or in the context that affords any argument against this interpretation. In the fortieth verse the apostle sums up the whole matter in these words "But she is happier if she so abide (*i.e.* abstain from marrying), after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God." Does this imply that the apostle was uncertain and unable to decide whether this judgment was given under the guidance of the Spirit of God or not? This is a notion in the highest degree improbable, and one which if true would be attended with serious and alarming consequences. If the apostles were not themselves sure whether or not they were on any occasion acting under the guidance of the Spirit, we are deprived of any certain ground for our faith. But it can be easily proved that according to the usage of language the word *δοκῶ* here used does not necessarily imply anything of doubt or uncertainty, but is frequently employed, when an explicit assertion or firm persuasion is intended to be expressed. This is fully proved in Whitby's note upon the passage, who also suggests, and the idea is a very probable one, and had indeed previously received the sanction of Calvin, that the apostle adopted this phraseology *δοκῶ δε λέγω*

ἐχέτω instead of καὶ γὰρ ἐχέω, because of the doubts which some of the Corinthians entertained of his apostolic authority, as if he had said, "This is my judgment, and whatever some of you may think, or my enemies may allege, I am pretty confident that the Spirit of God has directed me in forming and expressing it." Calvin indeed says that there seemed to be something ironical in his using this expression.—"Non tamen videtur ironia carere quod dicit *Existimo*, nam quum pseudo-apostoli, Spiritum Dei inflatis buccis identidem jactarent, ad auctoritatem sibi arrogandam, et interea Paulo detrahere studerent, dicit se quoque sibi videri compotem Spiritus non minus quam ipsos."

The apostle then must be regarded as shutting up this matter by assuring the Corinthians that the judgment which he gave upon this question, to the effect of rather discouraging marriage in the then condition of the church, though from the nature of the case it could not assume the form of a command or injunction, and left any one of them at liberty to marry or not as he thought best, was not merely his own private opinion, but one formed in the exercise of his apostolic authority, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that upon the whole we are entitled to assert that the apostle does not make any such distinction between his own opinion and the commandments of God as to throw any real difficulty in the way of our believing that all that is contained in this chapter may be ascribed, both as to the words and the thought, to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.



LECTURE XXXII.

INSPIRATION (CONCLUDED).

WE have now laid before you a brief outline of the grounds on which not only the divine origin and authority in a general sense, but the plenary verbal inspiration of the books of Scripture, rest, and may be fully established. The divine origin and authority of the books of Scripture cannot be proved by external evidence, which merely as evidence, would have any effect upon the minds of men not yet persuaded of its truth, until the divine mission of Christ and his apostles has been first established. But when this is proved, and when thus the truth of what they declared to men in God's name is established, there is no difficulty in adducing adequate and abundant proof of the divine origin and authority of the books of Scripture, even as against unbelievers, and without the internal evidence which arises from the discoveries men make in studying the word under the guidance of the Spirit, and from the effects which the word in the hand of the Spirit produces upon their minds and hearts. The subject of the divine origin and authority of the books of Scripture we have regarded as comprehending the discussion of this general position, that God's immediate and supernatural agency was so interposed, not merely in the communication of the substance of the revelation, but in the production of the books which contain it, that they are all his word, stamped throughout with his authority; while under the head of inspiration we have considered more particularly the way and manner in which God's agency was interposed in the production of the books of Scripture, and the consequent character of the resulting product, with more especial reference to the question whether the supernatural agency of God in the production

of the books extended throughout to the words as well as to the thoughts. We can know nothing of the precise way in which the agency of God was exerted in this matter except from himself, or from those whom he employed as his agents or instruments, that is, from the statements of Scripture. And in turning our attention to the statements of Scripture we find in general that they give us no definite information whatever as to the mode of the Spirit's agency, in producing the books of Scripture, upon the minds of those who were the authors of them; but that the information communicated respects almost wholly the books themselves—the character of the product as distinguished from the mode of production. On this ground, coupled with the entire want of any scriptural evidence, we have seen reason for dismissing altogether the various kinds or degrees of inspiration which have been invented and set forth by many authors, as descriptive of the different modes in which the Spirit is supposed to have operated upon the minds of the prophets and apostles in producing the different portions of Scripture, and for contenting ourselves with abstaining from all attempts to explain the mode of the Spirit's operation in the matter, further than by saying that the authors wrote as well as spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and that the agency of the Spirit extended to the suggestion of the words as well as the thoughts. This view of the origin and character of the books of Scripture, commonly called the doctrine of their plenary verbal inspiration, is, we have seen, plainly supported by the authority of Scripture itself, when it tells us that the books themselves were given by inspiration of God, when it sets before us the way and manner in which our Saviour and his apostles dealt with the statements they quoted from the Old Testament, as well as by other collateral and less direct topics of evidence. After explaining the direct evidence upon which the doctrine of the plenary verbal inspiration of the Scripture rests, we have examined some of the principal objections which have been adduced against it, especially those commonly adduced by men whose views of the inspiration of the Bible approach nearest in point of soundness to what we reckon to be the truth upon this point—men such as Dr Pye Smith and Dr Hill, who hold that some parts of the Bible were verbally inspired, and that the whole of it was composed under such a guidance or superintendence of

the Spirit, as to preserve the authors from all error in their statements. And we have seen reason to believe that the objections, as coming from men who hold these views, prove too much, and therefore prove nothing ; that they rest upon no solid foundation, and that at best, even if they could not be so directly answered as they can be, they would just stand as difficulties attaching to a mysterious, and to a large extent unknown, subject, without affording any sufficient ground for refusing to yield to the force of the proper evidence, not directly assailed, on which the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration rests.

The books of Scripture were all undoubtedly in a sense the word of man, the result in some sense of the operation of men's faculties, and exhibiting plainly and palpably the traces of the personal individuality of the authors. They are also in some sense, as is admitted by all who hold the doctrine of inspiration in any form, the word of God, and to be ascribed to the agency of his Spirit. And thus the difficulty attaching to the subject of inspiration may be said to run up into that which constitutes the one grand difficulty, in which all the difficulties connected with theological speculations ultimately terminate, the difficulty, viz., of explaining how it is that God and man are combined or united, as in some sense they undoubtedly are, in the production of man's actions. Any doctrine upon the subject of the origin and character of the books of Scripture which comes short of that which maintains their plenary verbal inspiration, necessarily implies that the Bible is partly the work of God, and partly the work of man, but not in any sense *wholly* the work of either ; whereas the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration, but that alone, implies that in one sense they are wholly God's work, and in another wholly man's ; and the difficulties supposed to attach peculiarly to the doctrine of verbal inspiration arise wholly from the difficulty of reconciling these two positions in their application to this matter, from an assumption that the agency of man in the production of the books of Scripture, as it actually is exhibited on the face of the books themselves, must necessarily exclude such an agency on the part of the Spirit of God in the matter as the doctrine of verbal inspiration implies. Such a mode of reasoning manifestly partakes of the character at once of presumption and uncertainty, as it virtually amounts to an assertion of the impossibility of certain things

taking place in the process of the agency of the Spirit of God upon the spirit of man, while the doctrine which ascribes the Bible wholly in one sense to God, and wholly in another sense to man, is much more accordant, both with the particular statements of Scripture, and with the phenomena which it presents, while it is really attended by no more serious and formidable difficulties than the other. It is a consideration which ought not to be lost sight of in discussing this subject, that the concession that verbal inspiration applies to *some* parts of the Bible precludes many of the objections which have been sometimes urged against the doctrine we defend. It at once cuts off all *a priori* objections, and all objections of a general kind, founded upon anything which applies to the Bible as a whole, although, as we have seen, some of those who have argued against plenary verbal inspiration have adduced against it objections which, if really possessed of any weight, would prove, in opposition to what they themselves admit, that no part of the Bible was verbally inspired; all objections derived from man's constitution, and from the laws that regulate his mental operations. Some of those who have defended the doctrine of verbal inspiration have acknowledged that some of the difficulties attaching to it were not very easily answered or explained, and upon the ground that these difficulties were not only somewhat formidable but very obvious, as lying upon the surface, and apt at once to strike men whose attention was directed to the question, they have been induced to depart from the order usually followed in the discussion of important questions, by beginning with answering the objections and removing the difficulties, before proceeding to adduce the direct and positive proofs in support of the doctrine they defended. This is the course followed in two of the very best books we have upon the subject, by Dr Leonard Woods, of Andover, in his *Lectures on the Inspiration of the Scriptures*, and Gaussen, in his *Theopneustia, or Plenary Inspiration*, which I have already had occasion to commend to you. The reasons of adopting such an arrangement are stated by Dr Woods in a passage which contains a comprehensive summary of the objections to the doctrine of plenary inspiration, which are discussed and answered in his book, and discussed judiciously and ably.¹

¹ Lecture iii. pp. 59, 60.

I am not by any means satisfied that the order or arrangement followed by Dr Woods and M. Gaussen in the discussion of this important and somewhat difficult subject is the best and most advantageous. Not only are we apt to feel in perusing these works, excellent as they are, that we are kept too long at the outset involved in objections and difficulties, a feeling which is apt to produce an unfavourable impression upon our views of the question; but besides, the fact that some of the most serious objections against plenary verbal inspiration just resolve into difficulties which cannot be very fully explained when viewed separately and by themselves, but must be neutralised by being set, as it were, against the direct proof of the doctrine, and by its being shewn that they are utterly inadequate to countervail it, seems to render it peculiarly important, in order to the production of a right impression of the whole subject, that the more usual order of discussion should be followed in this case, viz., by bringing forward, in the first place, the direct and positive evidence on which the truth of the doctrine rests, and then considering the objections which have been adduced against it. Some advantage, I think, arises in point of impression from the order which we have followed in discussing this subject, and some benefit has resulted in dealing with the objections, from our being able to shew that, as they did not affect the direct proof *already* adduced in support of the doctrine itself, they were to be regarded as at best merely difficulties, the solution of which might be more or less specific, more or less direct, and more or less satisfactory, but which, at any rate, afforded no sufficient ground, in right reason, for rejecting a doctrine which involved nothing absurd, contradictory, or inconsistent with first principles—a doctrine, the proof in evidence of which was direct and satisfactory, and had not been assailed upon its own appropriate ground. It is true that some of the objections to plenary verbal inspiration are at once obvious and plausible; but this fact is only the stronger reason why men should make themselves familiar with the leading direct proofs on which the doctrine primarily rests; examine carefully into their nature and grounds, and if satisfied of their validity, be ever ready to present them in opposition to any mere difficulties by which the doctrine, as distinguished from the evidence on which it is founded, may be assailed. And the doctrine is one of considerable

practical importance, and does somewhat materially affect our general views and impressions of the sacredness and authority of the Scriptures. It is plain that the different views men take upon the subject of inspiration must materially affect their reverence for the statements of Scripture, and the fulness and cordiality of their practical submission to its authority. This is very palpable in regard to the lower and looser views which have been held in regard to the divine origin and authority of the Bible. The German rationalists, denying all immediate supernatural revelation, while yet professing to regard the Scripture as, in some vague and general sense, coming from God, treat them with open contempt, and bring all their own notions into the Bible, in place of regulating their opinions by its statements. The Socinians, admitting an immediate supernatural revelation of God to men, but rejecting all proper inspiration in any part of the process of conveying to us the knowledge of this revelation, regarding the prophets and apostles merely as honest, though fallible, reporters of what they had been taught, without enjoying any special divine guidance in reporting it, have still abundant scope for exercising their own judgment and discretion upon the statements of Scripture, and do not scruple to charge the apostles with errors, blunders, and mistakes in reasoning; and in this way manage, while pretending in some sense to acknowledge the authority of the Bible, to persuade themselves of the falsehood of the great leading truths which the Bible, if it came from God at all, was manifestly intended to make known to us as his will. The same effect is observable in proportion among those who, admitting inspiration in some sense, and with reference to some portions of the Bible, yet hold it only in those lower senses which we formerly described to you. They all manifest, more or less, a want of thorough reverence for the word of God, and of implicit submission to its authority. They have generally indicated, and just in proportion to the lowness and deficiency of their views upon the subject of inspiration, a disposition to exercise their own reason, not merely in investigating and ascertaining the true meaning of scriptural statements—for this is right and legitimate—but in modifying and explaining away what the Scripture plainly enough teaches, and in this way have commonly been led to entertain defective and erroneous views of divine truth. For it is a remark-

able fact in the history of the church, and one fitted to suggest important warnings and instructions, that men who have held low and defective views upon the subject of inspiration, have very often been left to form defective and erroneous views in regard to the leading peculiar doctrines of Christianity, as if a tendency to indulge their own speculations upon theological subjects, without due deference to the authority of God's revelation, led them to cherish notions about the inspiration of Scripture, which left some room for such speculations as they were disposed to indulge in; and then these defective views of inspiration, practically applied and acted on, confirmed them in their erroneous views of Christian doctrine, and contributed to lead them farther astray.

We formerly had occasion to mention that when Le Clerc made his famous attack upon the inspiration of Scripture, which was the origin of an important controversy upon the subject, the only influential names he could quote as in some measure favouring his views were those of Erasmus, Grotius, and Episcopius—all men who, like Le Clerc himself, entertained most unsound opinions upon the great doctrines of the gospel system; and the same connection has been more or less fully exhibited ever since in the history of this subject. There has generally been, though of course not without occasional exceptions, a remarkable parallelism or analogy between the soundness of men's views upon the subject of inspiration and their general orthodoxy, or the correctness of their sentiments upon the great leading principles of divine truth—a parallelism manifest enough through all the gradations of error, from German Rationalism, which is infidelity, up through Socinianism, Pelagianism, Arminianism, to truth, as exhibited in the Calvinism of the word of God. There is indeed a fundamental difference between all lower views of inspiration and that which, while it admits only part of the Bible, and not the whole of it, to have been verbally inspired, yet asserts that the whole of it was composed under such a superintendence on the part of the Spirit of God as thoroughly preserved the authors from all error in their statements; and it cannot be doubted that many men have maintained this view, who held true scriptural principles in regard to the leading doctrines of the gospel. This doctrine may be admitted to secure all that is essential, for the

essential thing is that men have such views of the agency of God's Spirit as exerted in the production of the Bible, and of the divine authority of the Bible itself as coming from God, and being really his word, as shall lead them to submit implicitly their understandings and their hearts to its statements, without making any attempt to pervert them from their fair meaning, or manifesting any hesitation about submitting to their authority when their meaning is correctly ascertained. But still it is not so well fitted to produce and to preserve a profound impression of their sacredness, and a habitual and unreserved submission to their dictates, as the view which we believe to be indicated by the Bible itself. The lower views of inspiration have been commonly taken up and supported by men from a desire to escape from the paramount binding authority of God's revelation, and to have some scope for the exercise of their own judgment and discretion in the formation of their views upon theological subjects. This desire and propensity are strongly characteristic of men, and anything which leaves room for the gratification of it is in some danger of being abused. If men would honestly and consistently act upon the conviction that the Bible was wholly composed under such a direction and superintendence on the part of the Holy Spirit as to be altogether free from error, so that men's duty is just to ascertain the meaning of its statements, and then at once implicitly and absolutely to submit to them, the practical mischief of the deficiency or error of their opinion in denying plenary verbal inspiration might not be very great; but from the tendency in human nature to which we have adverted there is reason to fear that the exclusion of the agency of the Spirit from the suggestion of the words of some parts of Scripture, though the supporters of this view may acknowledge that they do not know what parts are verbally inspired and what not, and may profess and honestly intend to treat it all as if it were dictated by the Spirit, may insensibly lead them to have practically less reverence for its statements, and to pay less deference to its authority, may make them more ready to indulge in some of those methods of escaping from the full impression of the fair meaning of its statements which have been so largely practised in every age. While therefore we should not overrate the practical importance of the difference between the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration and that which ascribes verbal inspiration only

to some parts of Scripture, but maintains that it has been all composed under such divine superintendence as to be wholly free from error, neither should we reckon it a light matter what opinion we hold upon this subject; and we should take care to investigate it thoroughly, and to make up our minds concerning it. It is of special importance to remember that the proper question to be determined is not what measure of inspiration we might conceive to be necessary or sufficient or desirable, but what is the actual truth upon the point as established by the word of God itself, as ascertained from its statements, and from the facts and phenomena which it presents.

If the Scriptures afford us sufficient grounds for believing, as we are persuaded they do, that the whole Bible was composed, even as to the words of which it consists, through the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit, then it is our imperative duty to receive this doctrine as a portion of God's revealed truth, and to seek continually to apply it for determining our feelings and regulating our conduct in regard to the sacred Scriptures; and then we may be assured of this, that both from the native tendency of this doctrine itself, and the influence it is fitted to exert in guarding us against some of the common sources of error in the interpretation of Scripture, and also from the blessing of God which may be expected to accompany the maintenance of right views of that word which he has magnified above all his works, we will be most fully and most certainly guided into all truth, and be led into a correct knowledge of his revealed will, and that the Holy Spirit who dictated the Bible, and whom we honour in recognising him as its author, will pour out upon us most abundantly his enlightening influences.

We have now only to advert to the literature of this subject. We have already given you some notices of the principal works upon the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures, as distinguished from their verbal inspiration; of the principal works in which the divine authority of the books of Scripture, as distinguished from the general truth of Christianity, is maintained and established, while yet their verbal inspiration was either omitted or else denied, but not very fully or formally discussed. We confine ourselves now to the topic of verbal inspiration, and to what has been formally written for and against it. You must have

noticed that in the discussion of this subject the authors to whom chiefly we have referred, and whose works we have quoted, are very modern, and several of them still alive; and it is indeed the case that the doctrine of verbal inspiration has been in some respects more fully illustrated, and more successfully defended of late than it was before. It is certain that the great body of the Fathers believed in the doctrine of verbal inspiration, but they were not called upon to contend in defence of it. The great majority of Protestant divines previous to the middle of last century, both Lutheran and Calvinistic, entertained the same opinion; but still no events took place which led to much discussion concerning it. The controversy occasioned in this country by the publication of Le Clerc's views did not lead to much discussion upon this precise question, because most of the works written in answer to him did not take up the position of defending verbal inspiration. This is true also of the controversies which have taken place upon the subject in Germany. The opposition made there to those who denied inspiration altogether has been commonly conducted upon principles which did not lead to much discussion of verbal inspiration; for few, if any, of those who have been most zealous in opposing rationalism have yet returned to the sounder views upon this point so strenuously maintained by the generality of Lutheran divines for nearly two hundred years preceding the middle of last century. The same holds true to some extent of the answers given to the attacks made upon inspiration by the Socinians of this country in the end of last century. One of the best books written against them, and one praised by Dr Pye Smith as the best book upon the subject, quoted also with high approbation and adopted by Horne in his *Introduction* (vol. i. app. ii), viz., Parry's *Enquiry into the Nature and Extent of Inspiration*, decidedly opposes the doctrine that inspiration extends to the words as well as the sentiments. Dr Pye Smith himself, in two long notes to the first book of his *Scripture Testimony to the Messiah*, while defending inspiration against the Socinians, has given a summary of the arguments by which he thinks the doctrine of verbal inspiration may be refuted. This opposition to verbal inspiration on the part of those who professed to be defending the doctrine of inspiration against the Socinians, together with some other circumstances which attracted a good deal of attention in this country about

twenty years ago, led to a fuller discussion of this subject, and produced, perhaps, better and more complete defences of the doctrine of verbal inspiration than any that had previously existed in our language.¹

¹ Haldane, Carson, and Gaussen ; Haldane on *The Authenticity and Inspiration of the Holy Scripture* ; Carson's *Theories of Inspiration of the Rev D. Wilson* (now Bishop of Calcutta), *Dr Pye Smith and Dr Dick Proved to be Erroneous*, and his *Refutation of Dr Henderson's Doctrine* in his late work on *Divine Inspiration*. [Characterise Dr Henderson and Woods, and fully commend Gaussen's latest and best book on the subject. Doctrine of our Confession of Faith merely quotes scriptural statements.]



LECTURE XXXIII.

CANON — APOCRYPHA (ORDER WITH RELATION TO INSPIRATION).

I WOULD scarcely have thought of recurring to the subject of the canon, had it not been that in the text-book little or nothing is said about the canon of the New Testament, and that there are some particulars not unimportant in which the investigation of the canon of the New Testament differs from the investigation of that of the Old. The question to be investigated under the head of the canon is this, What are the particular books which are entitled to a place in the collection of sacred writings, which have come from God, are stamped with his authority, and are intended by him to communicate his will? or, what is virtually the same thing, and what is really the shape in which the question practically presents itself to us for decision, Is the catalogue of books usually regarded by Protestant churches as divinely inspired a correct one? Does it contain no books which are *not* entitled to this character? and does it contain all which have a valid claim to admission? This question is evidently one of great practical importance, as affecting the rule or standard by which we are to ascertain and to judge of the will of God revealed for our salvation. And accordingly most churches have introduced into their symbolical books a list of the writings which they regard as canonical, as forming or constituting the word of God, and as possessed of supreme authority. In the first chapter of the Confession of Faith we have a list of the books of the Old and New Testaments, which are contained under the name of Holy Scripture, or the word of God written, and of all the books contained in this list or catalogue or canon it is asserted that they “are given by

inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life." Of course it is your duty to investigate the truth of this statement, and if satisfied of its truth, to be able to give some account of the grounds on which your conviction rests. It is said further, in the next section of the same chapter, that "the books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of Scripture, and therefore are of no authority with the church of God, nor to be otherwise approved of or made use of than other human writings." This deliverance in regard to the Apocrypha is laid down in opposition to the doctrine of the Church of Rome, as established by a decree of the Council of Trent, which includes most, though not all, of the books usually known as the Apocrypha, under the canon of the Old Testament, and in an age when everything connected with the Popish controversy is assuming additional importance, and when many who have not yet joined the Church of Rome are zealously labouring to corrupt the rule of faith, and are striving to bring us all into bondage to the authority of the church of the fourth and fifth centuries—a period within which a council, that met at Carthage, and had the presence and the sanction of Augustine, declared most of the apocryphal books in some sense canonical—it is right that you should be acquainted with the grounds on which a place in the canon is denied to them. As to the general grounds on which the canon of the Old Testament rests, there is little difficulty, and no great diversity of opinion. Christ and his apostles fully and plainly confirmed by their authority the ordinary Jewish canon of the period in which they lived, *i.e.* they gave full and clear testimony to this effect, that the books then ordinarily received by the Jews as canonical, were divinely inspired, that the Jews having had the oracles of God committed to them, had faithfully discharged this trust, and in the formation of their canon had not erred, either by defect or excess. This being very evident, the only question with all who admit their authority should be, What were the books which formed a component part of the received Jewish canon in the age of our Saviour? The settlement of this question undoubtedly depends mainly upon historical evidence. But the historical evidence is complete and conclusive; and the matter of fact being once established, the conclusion that these books are divinely inspired follows at once upon the authority of our Lord and his

apostles. We have no such direct and compendious way of establishing the canonical authority of the books of the New Testament. We cannot produce any such general authoritative testimony to the origin and character of these books collectively, and as combined together into one volume, so that it should be enough to ascertain that a particular book at a certain time formed a part of the collection, and that then at once, without any further reasoning, or any other medium of proof, its canonical authority followed as a matter of course. A more particular examination of the historical evidence, with reference to each book separately, is therefore necessary in investigating and establishing the canon of the New Testament.

There is one consideration suggested by the process by which the canon of the Old Testament is established that is of some importance in investigating that of the New, viz., that in order to establish the canonical authority of a particular book, it is not indispensable that we know with certainty who was its author. There are some of the canonical books of the Old Testament, the author of which is not certainly known, while yet we have the testimony of Christ to their being inspired and canonical. This of itself shews that it is not enough to disprove the claim of any book to be received as canonical, that its author is not certainly known, so that it is at least *quite possible* that we may have satisfactory evidence that a particular book is inspired and canonical, though we have not materials for establishing with certainty who was its author. The question of the canon of the Old Testament being by the principles clearly deducible from the statements of Christ and his apostles limited to this, what were the books which composed the received Jewish canon at that time? there is no material difficulty in determining that point. We have sufficient materials for ascertaining what books were then generally received by the Jews as canonical. We have these materials to a large extent in the New Testament itself, in the testimony of the contemporary Jewish authors, Josephus and Philo; in the universal and unwavering belief of the Jews from that period to the present day; and in the testimonies of some of the early Christian Fathers, particularly that of Melito (preserved by Eusebius), who lived in the second century, and who made the investigating of the canon of the Old Testament an object of peculiar attention and of diligent inquiry.

The books which compose the Protestant canon of the Old Testament alone were received as of divine authority by the Jews of our Saviour's days, and therefore these alone received his sanction. There is no plausible historical ground for doubting in regard to any one of them, even those whose divine origin some persons have been unwarrantably disposed to question upon internal grounds, that it then formed a part of the received Jewish canon; and there are no other books on whose behalf a claim possessed even of plausibility can be set up to a place in the then Jewish canon.

The books commonly called the Apocrypha, which were declared by the Council of Trent to be canonical, and to the divine origin and authority of which therefore the Church of Rome and every Popish priest is pledged, do not exist, like all the other books of the Old Testament, in the Hebrew language, but only in the Greek. They were composed in the interval between the prophet Malachi and the coming of our Saviour, a period during which there is good ground to believe that the gift of prophetic inspiration was withdrawn from the Jewish church, though it has been supposed from internal evidence that some of them were not written till the apostolic age. They came, in the course of time and in the progress of error and corruption, to be appended to or intermingled with the Greek and Latin versions of the canonical books of the Old Testament, and in most of the editions of these versions they have contrived to keep their place to this day. Most of the books commonly known by the name of the Apocrypha, and found generally in the Greek and Latin versions of the Old Testament, were declared by the Council of Trent to be canonical, and to be possessed of the same divine inspiration and authority as those which exist in the Hebrew language, and were generally received by the Jews. This decree was passed at the fourth session of the council, when only about fifty bishops were present, most of them merely titular Italian bishops, the creatures and pensioners of the Pope, and with very few among them who were entitled to the character of learned theologians. The canonical authority of the apocryphal books had never been publicly sanctioned by the church, and had been openly denied by many of the most learned men of the Romish community in every age, down to that in which the Council of Trent assembled. This decree of the council, establishing the canonical authority of

most of the apocryphal books, is so utterly destitute of any solid foundation, that some of the most learned Popish writers have given plain enough indications that they are ashamed of it, and that they would have been glad to have been saved from the degradation of defending it. But, as Dr Doyle once said in regard to another matter, "the Church has spoken at Trent, *causa finita est*." So these fifty bishops, most of whom were ignorant and unprincipled men, having decreed, and that too under an anathema, the canonical authority of the apocryphal books, though, as we learn from Father Paul, there was considerable difference of opinion in the council upon this subject, the Romish priests are obliged to do what they can to get up some plausible pretences in support of their claims to this distinction. We may briefly glance at some of the principal of these pretences. Some Popish writers have alleged that these books were received into the canon at two synods or councils alleged to have been held at Jerusalem about one hundred years before the birth of Christ. But this is a mere fabrication, which has not a shadow of historical evidence to rest upon, and it has been rejected by the more respectable Popish writers who have discussed this subject. The invention of such a story—and similar inventions are very common among Popish writers—just amounts to a plain confession that the canonical authority of these books cannot be established, unless it be shewn that they were in the received Jewish canon before our Saviour's time. Others have tried to shew that there was a difference between the canon of the Jews of Palestine and the canon of the Jews of Alexandria, where the LXX. version, into which these apocryphal books ultimately found their way, was chiefly executed, and that though these books might not be in the canon of Palestine, they were in the canon of Alexandria.

But it has been proved that this allegation too is destitute of any historical evidence, while, even if it were true, it would not be sufficient to give these books the benefit of the testimony of our Saviour and his apostles, which of course had reference to the canon generally received in Palestine. It has also been alleged that some of these apocryphal books are quoted in the New Testament, and they produce two or three cases in which a considerable similarity obtains between a statement occurring in the New Testament and one to be found in the Apocrypha. But there is

not one case of clear and certain quotation, and nothing like a case of quotation introduced by the formulæ usually employed in quoting from the Old Testament, and clearly recognising its divine authority. But the main ground on which the Popish writers have tried to defend the decree is this, that some of these books were read in the churches in early times, and believed to be canonical by some of the Fathers, from which they draw the inference that the canonical authority of these books must have been a tradition handed down from the apostles, to which they usually add, in order to help out the case, that the church has authority, if not to make books canonical which were not so before—though some of them have gone this length—at least to declare authoritatively what is canonical Scripture, and what are the apostolical traditions upon any subject. In regard to the authority or testimony of the early church, it has been proved conclusively by Protestant writers that the apocryphal books derive very little support from that source, and that the application of the famous rule of Vincentius Lirinensis upon the subject of tradition, which the Papists and Tractarians are accustomed to parade, and which is commonly expressed or indicated by the words “quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus,” does not afford them the slightest countenance. Indeed, with perhaps the single exception of the great principle of the right and duty of Christians in general to read the Scriptures, on which the church for the first five centuries was perfectly unanimous, there is probably no one point in the controversy between Protestants and the Church of Rome in which the doctrine of the Papists has less appearance of countenance from tradition, or the testimony of the early church, than this of the canonical authority of the Apocrypha; while it is also certain that its inspiration was denied by the most learned men of the Church of Rome itself, down to the period of the Reformation. I cannot occupy your time with adducing the evidence of this, but you will find it established beyond all question in the following works:—Field on *The Church*, appendix to the third book, chap. i.; Bishop Cosin’s *Scholastical History of the Canon*; and an unfinished but very valuable work of Bishop Stillingfleet’s, entitled *The Council of Trent examined and disproved* (lect. ii.). Bishop Cosin’s work is the fullest and most complete of these, and the

evidence produced in it was so conclusive that no Papist ever attempted to answer it. The evidence which the Papists have been able to find in tradition or in the early church in support of the canonical authority of the Apocrypha is of this sort. In the first three centuries the claim of these books to canonical authority was decidedly and unanimously rejected. It would seem that some of them were publicly read in the churches as early as, though no earlier than, the middle of the fourth century. But we know this chiefly from a decree of the Council of Laodicea in 363, forbidding any but canonical books to be read in the churches, and then giving a list or catalogue of the canonical books, in which none of the apocryphal ones are found. It appears that some of those books continued, notwithstanding the decree, to be read in the churches, though they were generally distinguished from the canonical books, and described by the specific name of "ecclesiastical." At length, in the beginning of the fifth century, a provincial council at Carthage, at which Augustine was present, in giving a list of canonical books, meaning however thereby only, —as there is good reason to believe, though the point is involved in some obscurity,—those which were and might be publicly read in the churches, included under this head most of the apocryphal ones. From this time the apocryphal books were generally bound up with the canonical Scriptures, and were read in the churches, although still the most eminent and learned men continued, as they had done from the apostolic age downwards, to deny their claim to inspiration, or to an equality of authority with the canonical Scriptures. These are the grounds on which the Church of Rome maintains that an apostolic tradition in favour of the canonical authority of these books exists, and has been duly and authentically handed down. No wonder that some Popish writers in discussing this subject have been disposed to rest mainly upon the alleged right of the church to declare authoritatively what is canonical Scripture and what are apostolic traditions, without being obliged to give an account of the grounds of her decisions. They will certainly never be able to prove the canonical authority of the apocryphal books until they have first proved the infallibility of the Council of Trent. If they could establish that, why then, as Dr Doyle says "*causa finita est*;" but there is no other medium of proof by which they are ever likely to convince any

one that the Apocrypha is a part of the word of God. So sensible are some of the more learned and candid Romanists of the deficiency of the evidence for the canonical authority of the Apocrypha, that they have been willing to admit, even since the Council of Trent, that they do not stand upon the same level in point of authority with the books which form the Protestant canon, and have invented a distinction to express this difference, calling the one proto-canonical and the other deutero-canonical. Somewhat analogous to the distinction which obtained in the early times between canonical and ecclesiastical.¹

Now, first, this distinction is in flat contradiction to the decree of the infallible council, which recognises no such distinction, and anathematises all those who do not receive them all as possessed of equal authority; and second, it is plainly a virtual admission that those which they call deutero-canonical are not canonical at all. These books are either the word of God, produced by his agency and stamped with his authority, or they are entitled to no more respect or influence than any other uninspired work. There is another distinction which has been brought to bear upon this matter to which it is proper to advert. It is a distinction borrowed from certain principles which are usually conceded and acted upon in the investigation of the canon of the New Testament. All the books which form the canon of the New Testament were universally and unanimously regarded by the early church as canonical and inspired, except the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistle of James, the Second Epistle of Peter, the Second and Third Epistles of John, the Epistle of Jude, and the Book of Revelation. Some, although not many, doubted for a time about the canonical authority of these books, although those doubts gradually cleared away; and early in the fourth century they were universally regarded with the same reverence as the others. This part, however, in the history of the canon of the New Testament has been usually indicated by the one class being called *ὁμολογούμενοι*, and the other *ἀντιλεγόμενοι*. Now, Cardinal Bellarmine, the great champion of Popery, being obliged to admit some distinction between the canonical and apocryphal books of the Old Testament, tries to represent this distinction as identical with that which is admitted as a historical fact in regard to these two classes of books in the

¹ Basnage, *Histoire de l'Eglise*, vol. i. p. 442.

New, and he does it very dexterously in this way¹: He proposes to consider the sacred books under three classes, the first consisting of those about whose authority there has never been any dispute in the church, and under this head he ranks all those books of the Old Testament which Protestants reckon canonical, *and none others*, and the *ὁμολογουμενοι* of the New Testament. The second class consists of those whose authority, although they are indeed truly prophetic and apostolic, has not been so thoroughly established, or so unanimously admitted; and under *this* head he ranks what we reckon the apocryphal books of the Old Testament and the *ἀντιλεγόμενοι* of the New. The third class consists of those which, though they have been held canonical by some eminent and learned men, as he alleges, have never been approved by the public judgment of the whole church. This last class he calls apocryphal, and comprehends under *it* those apocryphal books of the Old Testament which even the Council of Trent did not admit into the canon, viz., the prayer of Manasseh, the third and fourth books of Esdras, the third and fourth books of Maccabees, and the 151st Psalm. It was a very skilful artifice of this great controversialist to rank the apocryphal books of the Old Testament under the same head as the *ἀντιλεγόμενοι* of the New, which Protestants admit to be canonical. But there is a radical difference between the two cases; for, independently of the conclusive general objection against the apocryphal books, viz., that they never formed a part of the Jewish canon as sanctioned by Christ and his apostles, and independently of the conclusive evidence against their canonical authority resting upon internal grounds, there are most important differences between them in regard to the particular historical evidence, or the ecclesiastical tradition, concerning them. In regard to the *ἀντιλεγόμενοι* of the New Testament, all that can be established is that doubts were entertained by a few persons for a time, whether they were written by apostles or not. All that was desiderated was evidence that they were written by apostles, and when proof of this was diffused over the church, all doubt was removed, and in the fourth century they were universally received as canonical. Whereas, in regard to the apocryphal books of the Old Testament, there is no evidence that for the first three centuries and a-half any church on any data believe them to be canonical, while there is conclusive evidence

¹ *De Verbo Dei*, lib. i. chap. iv. p. 4.

that during that period they were generally regarded and openly declared to be destitute of all divine authority. Nothing certainly has since occurred or been discovered to remove the objections to their canonical authority which were regarded as conclusive during the first three centuries, or to confirm the evidence of their inspiration. And although, from the fifth century downwards, some held them to be canonical, they never were approved by the public judgment, or even by the general concurrence of the church, till the Council of Trent.

The internal evidence against the canonical authority of the apocryphal books is clear and conclusive. It consists of fabulous and contradictory narratives, statements both of doctrine and fact opposed to what is found in those Scriptures universally admitted to be canonical, and countenance given to some practises which the word of God condemns. You will find a very good summary of this evidence in the appendix to the first volume of Horne's *Introduction*, and a fuller statement of it in Mr Haldane's work on *The Authenticity and Inspiration of the Scriptures*. The principal reason which induced the Council of Trent to raise the apocrypha to the level of the word of God was, that it contains a testimony in favour of praying for the dead, which they try to make available—though it is quite insufficient for the purpose, even if it were admitted to be inspired—as a proof of purgatory; and that it contains several testimonies in favour of their grand corruption of the gospel, justification by deeds of love, and the meritorious efficacy of prayer, fasting, and alms-giving in procuring the favour of God and the forgiveness of sin. As in their controversies with the Reformers before the Council of Trent assembled, they could scarcely fail to see that there was a miserable lack of scriptural proof to support their doctrines, they wisely concluded that the opportunity was not to be lost, when an infallible Council which had authority to declare canonical Scripture and apostolic traditions was met, of establishing so useful an auxiliary. They have not, however, by this decree done any real mischief to Protestantism and sound doctrine, but have only injured themselves. They have indeed tied a millstone round the neck of the infallibility of the Church of Rome, by asserting a position and requiring assent to it under an anathema, which is notoriously and unquestionably false, and which the more candid and learned among

themselves, though obliged to profess, shrink from defending. Though the Reformers were unanimous in rejecting the claim of the apocryphal books of the Old Testament to a place in the canon, in denying to them divine inspiration and authority, they generally allowed them to retain their place in the Bible, and translated them into the vulgar languages. And in some editions of the Bible which were circulated on the Continent, the apocryphal books were not merely collected together and appended to the Old Testament—the form and position in which they commonly appear in Bibles printed in England—but they even were intermingled with the sacred Scriptures, coming in without any obvious and palpable mark of distinction at the places where they are introduced in the Septuagint, the source from which those apocryphal books and portions of books are derived. This was a very erroneous and dangerous practice, even in the less offensive form which it assumed in Bibles printed in England, in which the Apocrypha was appended and not intermingled, as tending to break down in men's minds a right sense of the distinction that ought ever to be maintained full and unimpaired between the word of God and the word of man, between writings which come from God, and are therefore possessed of supreme and infallible authority, and writings which besides being possessed of no authority whatever, are some of them liable to the still more serious objection of putting forth a *false* claim to a divine origin.

There is another topic connected with the canon of the Old Testament, which has of late attracted some notice, and is entitled to some share of your attention, and this is the attack that has been made upon the authenticity and canonicity of many of the books, and upon large portions of books of the Old Testament, by a series of German writers, some of whom have brought to this work a large amount of learning, accompanied generally with a miserable lack of common sense and sound logic. The principles upon which they usually proceed in this matter are these: The testimony of Christ and his apostles to the divine authority of the Old Testament, and to the integrity of the Jewish canon, is of no weight, for they either shared in the ignorance and error which generally prevailed among their countrymen in regard to the origin and character of their sacred books, or, though they had the discernment and sagacity to perceive the absurdity of the

prevalent Jewish notions upon these subjects, they to avoid offence, professed to concur in them, and usually spoke as if they believed in their truth and soundness. Miracles and prophecies are impossibilities, and all apparent predictions that really seem to have had a fulfilment must have been written after the events in which they seem to have been fulfilled. Having thus settled the whole question in the gross by general *a priori* considerations, they proceed to apply the principles of criticism more specifically and in detail to particular books and portions of books of the Old Testament, in order to shew that they are neither genuine nor authentic. This criticism is of two kinds, the lower and the higher. The lower consists of an examination of the languages and contents of the books, especially of the events recorded, and of the allusions to manners and customs, with the view of determining the age and credibility of the particular books. This process in its general character is quite a legitimate one, and it has often been successfully applied in proving that particular books were forgeries of a later age. All such attempts require to be investigated and answered, if they can be answered, in detail, and you ought to know something of the grounds of this description on which the genuineness of the books of the Old Testament has been assailed and defended. The higher criticism embodies the application of principles of a much more indefinite and impalpable description, and consists in substance in a mere appeal to the taste and feeling of men, an utterly uncertain and fallacious test by which to judge of matters that can be competently decided only by appropriate historical evidence. The books of the Old Testament have however stood without injury this the most formidable assault that has ever been made upon them. In the legitimate department of the lower criticism the evidence adduced to disprove the genuineness of particular books of the Old Testament has been subjected to a thorough investigation, and been proved to be utterly insufficient to serve the purpose for which it was brought forward; and in the department of the higher criticism the folly, capriciousness, and recklessness of those who applied this test have been so fully exposed, that even in Germany it is now generally abandoned to contempt.¹

¹ Hengstenberg's *Christology and Genuineness of Pentateuch and Daniel*; Alexander on *Canon of Old Testament*; Alexander on *Isaiah*.

LECTURE XXXIV.

CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

WE have already had occasion to mention to you an important difference between the materials we have for settling the canon of the Old Testament and those for settling the canon of the New. In regard to the Old Testament, we have the testimony of our Saviour and his apostles to the correctness of the canon as then generally received by the Jews; so that the only further question is, What were the books which then formed a component part of the canon of the Jews? Whereas, in regard to the New Testament, we have no such direct compendious and authoritative way of settling it, but must enter more in detail into an examination of the history and claims of each particular book. We cannot here enter into these details. You will find everything connected with the establishment of the canonical authority of each particular book in the New Testament fully explained and illustrated in many works which are quite accessible to you. Some of these works I have already had occasion to commend, and I shall again advert to the literature of the subject before taking leave of it. But let me impress it upon you that the canon of the New Testament, *i.e.* the ground of the claims of each particular book in the New Testament to a place in the canon of inspiration, and of the claim of the whole collection to the exclusion of all others, with the objections which have been adduced against the claim of each, and the arguments and facts by which these objections may be answered, form an important subject of investigation, with which you are bound to make yourselves acquainted. I mean to make only a few observations upon the general nature and bearing of the points that require to be attended to in this investigation, without professing to discuss

them. There never has been any material difference of opinion among Christian churches in regard to the canon of the New Testament. From the earliest period at which any Christian church can be said to have given a deliverance upon this subject down to the present day, there has been an almost universal concurrence among churches as to the books which ought to be admitted into the canon of the New Testament. Infidels have endeavoured to raise some difficulties upon the subject, both with respect to the canon in general and the canonical authority of particular books. Eminent men in the different branches of the church have occasionally denied the canonicity of one or more of the received books of the New Testament, and sometimes, though far less frequently, have contended for the admission of one or two ancient books which have not usually been allowed a place in the canon ; and the Papists, though they hold the same canon as Protestants so far as the New Testament is concerned, have, in their usual spirit, and in accordance with their ordinary plan of labouring to overturn every solid foundation for truth and religion, that they might establish the authority of the Church as the only ground of certain knowledge, have been ever willing to countenance infidel difficulties and objections. These then are the points to be attended to in the investigation of the canon of the New Testament ; and it is the more necessary that you should be well acquainted with this matter, because there is no one subject to which the learning and ingenuity of the Continental writers, ever since the rise of rationalism, has been more assiduously directed, and none perhaps in which they have laboured with a larger measure of success, than in assailing the canonical authority of the particular books of the New Testament. Many of them have exerted themselves with unwearied zeal and diligence to collect and set off every sort of argument or probability, internal and external, bearing upon this result ; and there is perhaps no branch of theological study in which, upon the whole, they have been more successful in doing mischief, at least to the extent of exciting doubts and suspicions in men's minds.

The evidence by which the canonical authority of the books of the New Testament is proved, is the same in kind as that by which we establish their genuineness. The books are proved to be genuine when it is shewn that they were the productions of the

men whose names they bear; and after it has been established that these men, the apostles of our Lord, were divinely commissioned teachers, and inspired by the Holy Ghost, the canonical authority of the books which they wrote follows as a matter of course. The chief difference between these two questions of the genuineness of the books of the New Testament and their canonical authority—I mean with respect to the proof that bears upon them—is this, that in establishing the genuineness of the books of the New Testament as a necessary branch of the general argument for the truth of the Christian revelation, we do not need to enter upon the consideration of all the books which compose the New Testament, as at that stage of the argument we have only to shew that we have the accounts given of the leading events on which the truth of Christianity rests, by men who were the original witnesses, and had the best opportunities of knowing them; whereas in investigating the canon we must examine all the books which profess to come from these men who have been proved to be divinely inspired, commissioned to reveal God's will, that we may know precisely what the sources are from which we are to learn the will of God as communicated by him through their instrumentality. Still, in regard to the one subject as well as to the other, it resolves to a large extent into a question of authorship. Were the authors of the books of the New Testament really those divinely commissioned and inspired men to whom they are usually ascribed? And did they or any other divinely commissioned and inspired men produce any other books now existing from which equally with those of the New Testament we are to learn the will of God? From this general explanation of the nature of the question, of the thing to be ascertained and established, you see at once how irrelevant and unreasonable are the principal difficulties which infidels have been accustomed to propound in regard to the canon of the New Testament in general. They have been accustomed to ask—when was the canon of the New Testament settled or established? by whom? on what authority? and they have sometimes answered these questions by saying that the canon of the New Testament was not established till after the middle of the fourth century, when it was done by the Council of Laodicea, which first published by ecclesiastical authority a list of the books that were held to be canonical. Now, there really never was any

such thing as what seems to be conceived of under the designation of establishing or settling the canon of the New Testament. The canonical authority of the books, their right to be regarded as an authoritative communication of the will of God, depends entirely upon the actual matter of fact of their having been composed by divinely inspired authors; and the settlement of the canon properly means nothing else than the establishment of this as a matter of fact by the appropriate evidence with respect to those books on whose behalf a claim to canonical authority has been put forth. Their canonical authority, their right to a place in that collection of sacred writings by which God purposed to make known his will, did not depend upon, and could not rightly be affected by, anything but just the fact of their being the productions of such men. When a divinely inspired man wrote a work under the guidance of the Spirit, its canonical authority, its right to be regarded as communicating God's will, was complete in itself whenever it was written, and its right to be received and submitted to by every man or church was settled or established whenever satisfactory evidence was produced that it was the production of an inspired author. This was the state of the case in the apostolic age itself. Paul, in concluding his First Epistle to the Corinthians, said, "The salutation of Paul with mine own hand" (xvi. 21); and in concluding his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, he said, "The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle" (iii. 17); and this practice of his plainly implies that the apostle himself and the churches of that age thought that all that was necessary in order to establish the claim of his writings to divine authority was just to prove that they were written or dictated by him. The state of the case continued of course the same after the apostle was removed from this world. The canonical authority of the book depended wholly upon its having been written by him, and the establishment of its canonical authority rested wholly upon the proof of this as a matter of fact. In investigating the canon of the New Testament, nothing more is necessary to a satisfactory result than to produce sufficient evidence in regard to all the books for which we claim a place there, that they were the productions of divinely inspired men who were commissioned and authorised by God to reveal his will. Nothing more than this is necessary, and nothing less will serve. We do not pretend to be

able to establish at once the canon of the New Testament as a whole by any conclusive and authoritative argument, which proves of itself that the whole books which compose it were given by inspiration of God, as we establish at once the canon of the Old Testament, by the testimony of Christ and his apostles. We acknowledge that we are bound to produce sufficient evidence that any book for which we claim canonical authority was written by a man who enjoyed divine inspiration. We are willing to undertake this burden of proof; and when we assume this responsibility we are fully entitled to throw aside as irrelevant all cavils about the time and circumstances of the establishment of the canon of the New Testament, a point about which we do not assert anything, and do not need to assert anything; and when we have completed our proof in regard to each particular book to which we assign a place in the canon of the New Testament, we are then entitled to say that the cause is finished, that we have established our position; that to raise difficulties, as infidels and Papists often do, about the alleged time and manner of what is called settling the canon as a whole is merely to cavil and to evade the argument, and that the only way in which we can be fairly and honestly met is to assail the evidence which has been produced in support of the claim of each particular book to a place in the canon, as being the production of a man who was divinely inspired, or to produce satisfactory evidence that there are other books which upon the same grounds are equally well entitled to be received as canonical Scripture. The question as to when the books which compose the canon of the New Testament were first collected into one volume is a mere matter of historical curiosity, and has really nothing to do with settling their canonical authority, though these two questions have been commonly confounded by those who have laboured to involve this whole matter in obscurity and uncertainty. Their canonical authority depends upon their authorship; and we estimate the testimonies, whether of individuals or churches or councils, the whole mass of quotations, references, and other materials derived from the works of ancient writers, upon the ordinary recognised principles applicable to the historical evidence of a matter of fact.

The testimony of the Council of Loadicea, as indicating the general mind of the church in the fourth century, is merely one item in the proof, which concurs with and confirms a large body of

historical evidence, earlier and more direct, and forming in the aggregate a mass of satisfactory and conclusive proof of these two positions as matters of fact—first, that all the books which are usually included in the canon of the New Testament were the productions of men who were divinely inspired; and second, that no other alleged productions of the apostolic age have a valid claim to the same origin and authority. These considerations will point out to you how easily you can dispose of any difficulties which may be adduced about what is called the time and manner of settling the canon of the New Testament as a whole; *while at the same time* they will convince you of the necessity and importance of your being familiar with the grounds on which the claim of each particular book to a place in the canon may be established. We have already indicated the two leading questions which are to be discussed in investigating the subject of the canon—first, whether all the books which are usually included in the canon of the New Testament are entitled to a place there, as having been the productions of inspired men; and second, whether there are any other books which are entitled to a place in the canon as having been also composed by the inspired men of the apostolic age. And we shall in the first place briefly notice the second of these questions, the less important of the two. There is a considerable mass of writings sometimes comprehended under the general designation of the apocryphal books of the New Testament—writings of very different kinds and characters. It can scarcely be said that any very decided or influential effort has ever been made to establish their claim to canonical authority. Under this general designation have been sometimes comprehended the writings of the apostolical Fathers, both those whose genuineness has been generally admitted, and those whose genuineness has been disputed, though the term may be applied with more propriety to those works which profess to be written by apostles and evangelists, but which have been generally regarded as forgeries. Some persons have been so enamoured of the writings of the apostolic Fathers, as to claim for them a place in the canon. Some Popish writers have regarded the Apostolic Canons and Apostolic Constitutions as the genuine works of Clement of Rome, and as though not canonical, as a whole, yet containing many genuine apostolic traditions, derived immediately from the mouths of the apostles.

Whiston, who was a singularly eccentric man, and much more remarkable for his honesty and learning than for his judgment, zealously contended that these, and all the other writings ascribed to Clement of Rome, are canonical; but no one has ever seriously contended that the gospels and epistles, which constitute the rest of what are called the Apocryphal books of the New Testament, are entitled to a place in the canon. They are generally senseless despicable forgeries. It would seem that a great many works were forged in early ages, and ascribed to the inspired apostles. A large proportion of these writings have perished, just because they were universally regarded as too worthless for preservation. But a few of them have been handed down to us, and though no one has ever seriously contended that they were entitled to a place in the canon, they have been sometimes paraded by infidels, as if for the purpose of involving the whole subject of the investigation of the canon in doubt and uncertainty. By classing the genuine and acknowledged works of the apostolic Fathers under the same head with the forged gospels, epistles, and liturgies ascribed to the apostles, which are the proper apocryphal books of the New Testament, they get a sort of pretence for making certain statements, which are true only of some of them, but which they apply to them all. In this way, and upon this ground, they assert that they were read in the churches in early times, and that they were often quoted and referred to by the Fathers with respect and deference, assertions which are true of one or two of the apostolic Fathers, but not of any of the rest. An attempt of this kind was made by Toland, the well-known infidel, in the very end of the seventeenth century, and another attempt of a similar kind has been made in our own day by the publication of what is called the "Apocryphal New Testament." Toland's principal work upon the subject was called *Amyntor*, and was published in 1698. It was directed to the object of considering the canon of the New Testament, and more particularly to the object of bringing forward all the apocryphal pieces, and insinuating that there was great difficulty in distinguishing between them and the books of the New Testament, especially because, as he alleged, though without evidence, they were promiscuously quoted, and were referred to as authoritative by early Christian authors. Several valuable works were published in answer to Toland's

Amyntor, especially by Drs Clark, Nye, and Richardson, but they have been all thrown into the shade by Jones's great work on *The Canon*, which, though not formally an answer to Toland, was evidently occasioned by it, and certainly contains abundant materials for answering it. Jones's work is written with great learning, judgment, and candour, and is a perfect store-house of materials in regard to almost everything connected with the apocryphal books of the New Testament. His first book contains an exposition of the subject of the canon of the New Testament in general, and of the principles by which all questions concerning it ought to be determined. His second contains all the notices to be found in ancient writers concerning any apocryphal books which have perished, and any fragments of them that may remain, and shews, by an investigation of every trace we have of them, that they were never regarded by any one, or at any time, as canonical or inspired. His third book contains at full length the original Greek or Latin, accompanied with an English translation, of all the apocryphal books now extant, with a similar investigation of all the references to them in ancient writers, and a similar proof that they have never been regarded as entitled to a place in the canon. His fourth book is directed to the object of establishing the canonical authority of each particular book in the New Testament. His death however prevented the completion of this. He finished only the historical books; but as I formerly had reason to mention, this want is supplied by Lardner in his supplement to the second part of his *Credibility*, entitled also *A History of the Apostles and Evangelists*. This work has been republished at full length in Bishop Watson's *Theological Tracts*. No further discussion took place in this country about these apocryphal books for nearly a century. In 1820 Hone, the well-known infidel and blasphemer, published a work with the following title: *The Apocryphal New Testament: being all the Gospels, Epistles, and other pieces now extant, attributed in the first four centuries to Jesus Christ, his apostles and their companions, and not included in the New Testament, by its compilers, translated from the original tongues, and now first collected into one volume*. This work is evidently directed to the same object as Toland's; and he makes use of some of Jones's materials, by copying his translation of some of the apocryphal pieces without acknowledg-

ment. It contains a translation not only of most of the apocryphal pieces, but also of the works of what we call the apostolic Fathers. The chief novelty about it is, that it is printed in several respects in imitation of the Bible, and is throughout divided into chapters and verses, the division into verses being the invention of the editor, and evidently intended to produce the impression of similarity to the canonical Scriptures. The work contains no direct discussion of the subject of the canon, and no formal attack upon the views commonly entertained concerning it ; but contains many statements and insinuations which are plainly fitted and intended to undermine its authority. The statement in the title page about the compilers of the New Testament is plainly intended to insinuate, in accordance with an error, which has been already exposed, that at some particular period, not very well ascertained, the canon of the New Testament was settled ; in other words, that a selection was made from among the mass of writings which had been ascribed indiscriminately to Christ and his apostles, a notion not only utterly unsupported by any historical facts, but quite inconsistent with the whole principles on which the early church acted in this matter, in seeking only in regard to each particular book for satisfactory evidence that it was the production of a divinely inspired author. This notion is more fully brought out in the preface, which proposes to answer this question : "After the writings contained in the New Testament were selected from the numerous gospels and epistles then in existence, what became of the books that were rejected by the compilers?" The editor is disposed to ascribe this selection to the Council of Nice. There is not a shadow of historical evidence that the Council of Nice did anything in the least resembling this ; but he seems to have selected the Council of Nice, merely because he had collected two or three passages which he quotes from different authors, who had spoken unfavourably of that council, and he has a good many statements all directed to the object of insinuating that at some period or other such a selection was made, and made upon grounds which were quite indefinite and arbitrary. He makes repeated assertions too about the frequency with which some of these apocryphal pieces were quoted by the Fathers, and the respect with which they were spoken of, as if for several centuries they were generally regarded as standing very much upon the same footing as those which now form

the canon of the New Testament, and as if consequently, when a selection was made, it did not rest upon any certain and definite grounds.

This is quite inconsistent with the known facts of the case, as is fully established in the learned work of Jones, from which he took many of his translations. It must be admitted that there are a few passages in the writings of some of the Fathers in regard to some of the apocryphal books of the New Testament, which afford a sort of plausible handle to Papists in the one case, and to infidels in the other, for the allegation that they reckoned these books canonical or inspired. But it has been conclusively proved that to put such an interpretation on these few statements is to wrest them from their proper meaning; and that though some of them occasionally employed loose and inaccurate phraseology upon this, as they did upon most other subjects, yet that there was a clear and decided judgment of the whole stream of ancient authors distinguishing between those books which composed the canon of Protestant churches, and all others which have ever been alleged to be canonical and inspired by God. These apocryphal works are of two very different classes, though in Hone's Apocryphal New Testament they are all ranked under one general head. One class consists of gospels and epistles, which are ascribed to some of those apostles from whom we have gospels or epistles in our New Testament; and *those are in every instance* plain palpable forgeries, which, though sometimes referred to and quoted by some of the Fathers, have never been supposed by any to be entitled to a place in the canon. The other and more respectable class of writings comprehended in the Apocryphal New Testament, and sometimes included in the general designation of apocryphal books, are the writings of those who are called the apostolical fathers—Barnabas, Clement, Polycarp, Ignatius, and the Shepherd of Hermas. Were the epistle usually ascribed to Barnabas, really the production of that Barnabas who was so long the companion of Paul, this might be regarded as a strong presumption that it was inspired and canonical; but we have reason to be thankful that there is no sufficient historical evidence that it was the production of that Barnabas, or that it was regarded by the early church as canonical; and the proof which Jones has adduced in the last chapter of his

third part that it is not genuine, but spurious, is, we think, perfectly conclusive. The epistle of Clement of Rome was sometimes read in the churches in early times; but it is well known that this is no proof that it was then reckoned canonical, neither can any other sufficient evidence be adduced that it was ever regarded as inspired. It contains no internal evidence to disprove its genuineness, and much less than that of Barnabas that sinks it palpably below the canonical books; but what is conclusive upon the point is that Clement himself in the epistle disclaims inspiration and apostolic authority. The same is true of the epistle of Polycarp, and the epistles of Ignatius, not to speak of the serious doubts attaching to the genuineness, or at least the integrity, of the latter. The only other remaining work of this class is the Shepherd of Hermas, of which some of the Fathers, very little to the credit of their taste and judgment, have spoken in terms of high commendation, but in regard to which none have made any statement which even seems to imply either that he himself or the church of his time reckoned it canonical, except Origen, who on one occasion speaks of it as a book "which was very useful, and, as he thought, divinely inspired." But it has been proved from Origen's own writings—first, that the church in general of that period did not concur in the high estimate he had formed of this work; and secondly, that even Origen himself, though on one occasion he called it divinely inspired, to express his high sense of its value and excellence, did not really regard it as canonical, or as forming a part of those sacred writings from which we are to learn the will of God. There is nothing then to fear from any of these writings that have been comprehended under the designation of the Apocryphal New Testament. The evidence, whether internal or external, by which a claim on their behalf to a place in the canon may be either asserted or insinuated, is marked by a clear and broad line of demarcation from that by which we can establish the divine origin and authority of all those which we receive as canonical. This Apocryphal New Testament, of which and its contents you will find a very good exposure in the appendix to the first volume of Horne's *Introduction*, occasioned the publication of an able and valuable little work, entitled *Proofs of Inspiration; or, The Grounds of Distinction between the New Testament and the Apocryphal Volume*, by the Rev. Thomas Rennel. He professes to defend plenary as opposed to

partial inspiration ; but by this he does not mean verbal, or as he calls it, organic inspiration, which he opposes, though without adducing anything very formidable against it. But on the subject of the canon generally, and especially upon this topic of the apocryphal books, it is an excellent work, and may be read with much advantage. There are some of the productions which may be comprehended under the designation of the apocryphal books of the New Testament, that are not contained or discussed in any of the works we have yet mentioned. These are the Apostolic Canons and Constitutions, which profess to have been compiled by Clement of Rome, and to contain much of what the apostles prescribed for regulating the government of the church. The classical work against their genuineness and authority is a book by Daille or Dallæus, the author of the famous treatise, *De usu Patrum*, entitled *De Pseud-Epigraphis Apostolicis*. Neither in Jones nor in the Apocryphal New Testament have we any specimens of the Liturgies which profess to have been framed by the apostles, and yet there have come down to us professedly from apostolic times no fewer than five liturgies, by Matthew, Mark, John, Peter, and James. They are quite as palpable forgeries as the pretended gospels and epistles. They are published in the third part of a very valuable and important work on this subject—*Fabricius, Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti*.



LECTURE XXXV.

CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

HAVING adverted to the grounds upon which we found the proof that no books not usually included in the canon of the New Testament have any right to a place there, we have now briefly to notice the way in which the claim of the commonly received books to a place in the canon of the New Testament is established. We have already explained to you that this virtually resolves in the main into the question of authorship, *i.e.* into the question whether or not the books of the New Testament were really the productions of those divinely commissioned and inspired men whose name they bear; although it is also to be remembered that the attestation given by Christ to the canon of the Old Testament, containing some books the authors of which are not known, warrants us to maintain this general position, that we may have sufficient evidence of the canonical authority of a book, about the author of which we have no certain information. Having no general conclusive proof bearing upon the canonical authority of the whole books of the New Testament, similar to that furnished by the testimony of Christ and his apostles to the whole of the Old, we are bound to investigate and establish the claim of each particular book to a place in the canon. This however is not so laborious a proof, and does not require so lengthened an investigation, as might at first sight appear. With regard to by far the greater number of the books which compose the New Testament, twenty out of twenty-seven, we have the unanimous testimony of all antiquity, established by a series of quotations and references and declarations and implications, extending back to the apostolic age, to the effect that they were the productions of the men whose names they bear, and to whom they are commonly ascribed, and that they were received

and acknowledged as given by inspiration of God. This statement applies to the historical books, *i.e.* the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the thirteen epistles of Paul (not including the Epistle to the Hebrews), and the first Epistles of Peter and John. These books are called usually, in accordance with some statements of Eusebius upon this subject, *ὁμολογούμενοι*, because no opposition was ever made to their genuineness and canonical authority, and no doubt ever entertained about it. This you will find conclusively established in the ordinary books upon the subject. Now, this is the proper evidence for establishing the point under consideration, and it bears upon it full, unbroken, untouched. There is no evidence of an external kind to be produced upon the other side, and there is nothing derived from any internal source, from an examination of what is contained in the books themselves, which, to say the least, affords any reason for doubting the conclusion to which it leads. We know then and believe upon these grounds that all these books which form much the largest portion of the New Testament, were the productions of the persons to whom they are usually ascribed, and were from the time when they were first made known universally received as canonical and inspired. And we know that the men who wrote them, the apostles of Jesus Christ, were under the immediate and infallible guidance of the Holy Ghost, in their writing as well as in their oral teaching. This seems all quite satisfactory and conclusive. There is, however, one difficulty that has been started as to the completeness of the evidence, based upon the fact that three out of those universally received books, *viz.*, the gospels of Mark and Luke, and the Acts of the Apostles, were written by men who were not apostles, and of whose inspiration it may be and has been alleged that we have no satisfactory evidence. Now, let it be observed that this difficulty does not properly apply to the subject of the canon as such, and the evidence which bears upon the settlement of it, but rather to the general subject of inspiration. The historical evidence for the right of these books to a place in the canon is precisely the same as for those undisputed books the *ὁμολογούμενοι*, that were written by Matthew, John, Peter, and Paul, *i.e.* we have just the same evidence that these books really were written by Mark and Luke; and moreover that they were universally received and regarded by the primitive church as

inspired and canonical, as originating in the same source, the inspiration of God, and possessed of the same infallible authority as those written by the apostles. So far then as the unanimous testimony of the primitive church, evinced in the reception of the books and in the authority ascribed to them, can establish either canonicity or inspiration, it tells nothing more in favour of the apostles than it does of their companions and associates, Mark and Luke. But then it would seem that the leading point to be established by an appeal to the testimony or consent of the early church is, that the books of the New Testament were written by the persons to whom they are usually ascribed, and that then the fact that those persons were divinely inspired being already and previously proved, the canonical authority of the books followed as a matter of course. If this be a correct statement of the course and connection of the argument, it would seem that in order to establish the claim of the writings of Mark and Luke to a place in the canon, *i.e.* their claim to be received as a portion of those writings in which the will of God is authoritatively and infallibly communicated to us, we must have some other separate evidence of these men having been inspired, than merely what is implied in the reception by the early church of their writings as canonical.

Now, you will recollect that, in considering the inspiration of the books of the New Testament, we shewed you that the proof depended very materially upon our Saviour's commission and promise to his apostles, and upon the evidence we possess in the nature of the case, and in their own statements, for extending the results and benefits of this commission and promise, or, in one word, the infallible guidance of the Spirit, to their writings as well as to their oral instructions. And when the subject under consideration was the general nature of the inspiration they enjoyed, and the general character which it communicated to the resulting products, it was enough to apply the argument to the writings of the apostles which form a large portion of the New Testament, without specially adverting to those parts of it which were not written by apostles.

Paul stands upon a somewhat different footing from the other apostles to whom the promise of the immediate and supernatural agency of the Spirit was originally and directly given. But there is no difficulty about his case, for this reason, that we have just as

satisfactory and as explicit ground for believing that he was called to the apostolic office, and was supernaturally and infallibly directed, as that Matthew and Peter and John were. So that the question remains, Have we any distinct and explicit evidence that Mark and Luke were inspired men, who enjoyed the special and immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit? or must we depend wholly upon the testimony of the early church to the inspiration of their writings? and if so, is this enough? Now, the proper way of discussing this point is in the first place to investigate what we find in Scripture with regard to Mark and Luke, with the view of ascertaining whether or not there are any materials for regarding them as inspired. And here it is plain in general that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were not confined to the apostles, that there were many besides them who had the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy, *i.e.* who were supernaturally guided by the Spirit in the exposition of divine truth, even as to the words which they employed in conveying it. This of course was all that was necessary for enabling them to compose an infallible history of Christ, or of his church; and if there were others besides the apostles who had such gifts, there is nothing improbable in the idea that those gifts might be employed by the Spirit who conferred them in the production of some parts of those writings which were intended to be the rule of the church's faith and practice, as well as the similar gifts conferred on the apostles. And then from the relation in which both Mark and Luke stood to the apostles, as it is indicated in the Scriptures, it is in the highest degree probable that they shared in these gifts of the Spirit. This relation was indeed similar to that held by Timothy, Titus, Clement, and others. If any genuine writings of Timothy and Titus had come down to us, there would have been very strong probability in favour of their being inspired and canonical. Although there is no evidence that Clement was so closely associated with the apostles as Mark and Luke were, there would have been a strong probability in favour of the inspiration of his genuine writings, especially if they had been generally received as inspired by the primitive church, and if he had not himself disclaimed inspiration and infallibility, as he has virtually done. Upon these grounds there is a very strong probability that Mark and Luke were inspired men, and that their writings were given by inspiration of God; and the testimony of

the primitive church to the inspiration of their writings is sufficient to complete the proof, because it is not merely a testimony to the *opinion* that the writings of Mark and Luke were inspired, and entitled to a place in the canon; but it comprehends several important *matters of fact* which, if true, and there is no reason to doubt them, go directly and independently of all mere opinion and speculation to establish the inspiration and canonical authority of these writings. The unanimous reception by the primitive church of the writings of Mark and Luke as canonical and inspired, a reception that seems from the very first to have been as unhesitatingly and cordially extended to them as to those of the apostles, may be fairly regarded as implying and proving that Mark and Luke gave their writings to the church as inspired, or claimed inspiration for them. We know that in early times there were many other works which professed to give an account of the same things, most of which have perished, just because the church attached no value to them; and in these circumstances the only satisfactory explanation of the fact that from the first the writings of Mark and Luke were received as on a level in point of value and authority with those of the apostles, is that they themselves laid claim to the special and infallible guidance of the Spirit, and that this claim was made in such circumstances and rested upon such grounds as at once insured its reception. Had they in their writings laid claim to divine inspiration the claim would have been at once conceded, and it is one common objection against their inspiration that they have not formally claimed it. They have not done so; but Matthew has not laid claim to it any more than they. They have said nothing which affords any ground for doubting their inspiration, for it has been shewn that the introduction to Luke's Gospel does not warrant any inference of this sort. Men occupying such a place as they did could not have laid such writings before the church without in some way or other indicating to what source these writings were to be ascribed, and what authority they claimed, and the origin and authority actually assigned to them by the general consent of the church from the first and without any hesitation, must in all fairness be regarded as corresponding with that which in some way or other they were known to have claimed for themselves. There are some more specific matters of fact bearing upon this subject, of which, in what may be

comprehended under the head of the testimony of the church, we have sufficient evidence, viz., that the apostle John gave his sanction and approbation to the Gospels of Mark and Luke as well as that of Matthew, and wrote his own Gospel with the view of completing the history of Christ by introducing some things not contained in theirs; that Mark wrote his Gospel under the immediate direction and guidance of the Apostle Peter, who in the end of his first epistle described him as Marcus, his son, and intimated that he was then with him in Babylon; and that Luke wrote his Gospel and the Acts under the immediate guidance and direction of Paul, whom he accompanied in his voyage to Rome, and with whom he remained for some time in that city.¹ Upon all these grounds we think it manifest that there is no reason to doubt, and quite sufficient ground to believe, that Mark and Luke wrote under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit, and that the books which they wrote and gave to the church in such circumstances must have been entitled to the reception they undoubtedly met with, of being put at once without any hesitation upon the same level with those of the apostles, and regarded as canonical and inspired.

Michaelis in his *Introduction to the New Testament*—a book of great value, and containing much that is important and useful, but to be read with caution—has laboured to overthrow the canonical authority of the Gospels of Mark and Luke, as well as that of the Apocalypse. His arguments have been fully considered and exceedingly well answered in Alexander on *The Canon*, and the substance of his answer is given in the fourth volume of Horne's *Introduction*, under the head of Luke's Gospel.

We would now briefly advert to the ἀντιλεγόμενοι, or those books of the New Testament which were not always universally received as canonical by the early church. They are the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistle of James, the Second Epistle of Peter, Second and Third of John, the Epistle of Jude, and the Apocalypse. In regard to several of these, and especially the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Apocalypse, there are special peculiarities respecting their history and reception with which you ought to make yourselves acquainted, but into which we cannot here

¹ For strong internal probabilities of connection of Peter and Paul with those two Gospels see Rennell's *Proofs of Inspiration*, pp. 53–56.

enter. But it is true of them all that they were not universally received as canonical by the early church, and that it was not till the fourth century that the doubts which were entertained about their divine origin and authority disappeared. It is also true, however, that there are some general considerations, applicable to all or most of them, which enable us to account for this doubting or hesitation, and which may be sufficient to convince us that there is not now any reasonable ground for doubting or denying their canonical authority. The leading fact in regard to all the books is, that for the first three centuries and a half they were not received as canonical by the whole Christian church, as the rest of the books of the New Testament were; that while many maintained their claim to rank with the other books as canonical and inspired, some denied it and others doubted of it. But it is not difficult to account for this fact. The point to which the doubts that were entertained attached was this, and this only, whether or not these books were really written by the men whose names they bore, and to whom they were generally ascribed. Now, considering the condition of the world and the state of the churches, the means of intercourse, &c., there is no difficulty whatever in conceiving that writings published in one part of the world might be long in becoming known in another, and that even after they were in some measure known, it might not be very easy for some time to ascertain precisely their history, and to procure satisfactory evidence as to the matters of fact alleged concerning them. The existence of these doubts and difficulties as to certain books of the New Testament shews that the early churches were very careful and scrupulous as to the reception of any books as canonical and inspired, without full and conclusive evidence of their title. There were many apocryphal books in circulation pretending to be written by apostles, and the churches were on their guard against being deceived by any false pretences on this subject. Paul encouraged the churches to jealousy upon this point, by virtually telling them, in passages to which we formerly had occasion to refer, that they were to receive no epistles of his as genuine unless the salutation was written with his own hand. And this salutary caution and jealousy they seem to have faithfully practised—a fact which at once accounts for the doubts entertained for a time in some quarters of the church, about some books in regard to

which they had not for the present access to any satisfactory evidence that they were the productions of apostles or inspired men, and gives great weight to their testimony in favour of those in regard to which no doubt was ever entertained, and also to the ultimate testimony of the church in general in favour of the others likewise, after the doubts which had once attached to them had been removed, *i.e.* after satisfactory and conclusive evidence had been diffused over the whole extent of the Christian church that they were the production of the men whose names they bore, and to whom they were generally ascribed. These considerations, when viewed as they should be in connection with the actual evidence we have (on which however we cannot enter) of the canonical authority of each of these ἀντιλεγόμενοι singly and separately, and their ultimate universal reception by the church in the fourth century, when, through the favour of the civil authorities, intercourse and communication among the churches became much more easy, frequent, and general, afford sufficient evidence that these books, as well as the others which compose the New Testament, are well entitled to be regarded as canonical, as a part of those sacred writings which were produced by inspired men under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, and were intended by God to be the means of conveying to us his will for our salvation.

Some persons have been disposed to defer so far to the doubts entertained for a time in certain quarters in the early church as to the canonical authority of these particular books, and the consequent inferiority of the historical evidence in support of their claim to a place in the canon, as to lay it down as a rule not to produce proofs of doctrines from them, or not to receive any doctrines as thoroughly established unless they can be proved from other books of the New Testament. But this is an unnecessary and unreasonable scrupulosity. For the only fair question is—Is the historical evidence in support of their canonical authority *sufficient and satisfactory*? If so, it ought to be admitted and acted on. Now the historical evidence in support of the canonical authority of each of these books is, as you will see on examining it, though of course not altogether equal to that enjoyed by those books whose claim to a place in the canon was never doubted or questioned, quite sufficient to carry conviction to the mind, and of course to impose a corresponding obligation upon us as to our

treatment and use of them.¹ Perhaps some may be disposed to say that if this is the way in which the subject of the canon is to be settled, and this the evidence by which the canonical authority of the books of the New Testament is to be established, our faith must rest only upon mere human testimony, on no higher grounds than those which apply to any ordinary matter of history. Now, in regard to this objection, we may observe that the evidence of the canon, *i.e.* the proof of the canonical authority of the particular books of scripture, is analogous to the evidence of the truth of Christianity. They are both in a sense matters of fact, and to be investigated and decided in the first instance upon the ordinary principles and grounds applicable to matters of fact. When called upon to discuss in argument the truth of Christianity with those who openly deny it, we must establish its truth upon the ordinary principles of evidence held in common, and we should be able to do this so as to silence opponents, and to bring home to them, if they are at all honest and impartial, an obligation to deal with Christianity in such a way as we are sure will soon open to them much stronger and more impressive proofs of its truth than what is sometimes called the rational evidence, as usually discussed with unbelievers, could have furnished. So in like manner, in regard to the canon, we should be able to establish it in the first instance against any who might deny it, by its appropriate evidence as a matter of fact; by the historical proof that bears upon it, and to shew that this is sufficient in right reason to oblige men to hold the question as satisfactorily settled in argument; while here too we rely upon their discovering through the operation of the Spirit in the progress of their right use and study of the canonical books, and in accordance with a process admirably developed in the last chapter but one we examined in the text-book, second last chapter of Book IV., other and more impressive evidences that these books are indeed the word of God, given by divine inspiration, and communicated to us by God for the revelation of his will. In short, we must apply here the distinction which we have repeatedly had occasion to explain, between the external evidence, by which we can defend our cause in argument against opponents, and the internal evidence by which we may attain to a most thorough persuasion in our own minds, a persuasion, too, resting

¹ Haldane on the *Authenticity and Inspiration of the Scriptures*, p. 107.

on rational grounds, though we may not be able to develop them fully for convincing and impressing others. And the historical evidence is the more important in this matter of the canon, because many men who have studied the subject with the greatest care, and who have at the same time diligently studied the Bible under the guidance, there is the best reason to believe, of the Holy Spirit, have not been satisfied that men could by mere internal evidence, apart from the external or historical, be certainly persuaded of the canonical authority of each particular book in the Bible. We have already seen the sentiments of Baxter on this subject, and they are quoted and sanctioned by Dr Chalmers, and I will read to you extracts to the same effect from two living authors who, I have no doubt, answer fully to the description given above.¹

Mr Haldane in his valuable work on *The Authenticity and Inspiration of the Scriptures* (p. 98) objects very strenuously to the position that the "question of the canon is a matter of erudition, not of divine revelation;" and yet there surely is a sense in which this position is true. It cannot be said that we have the authority of any statement based upon revelation assuring us of what the particular books are which constitute the canon. Even in regard to the Old Testament, the canonical authority of which was attested as a whole by our Saviour himself, we still require to learn from some other source what the particular books were which constituted the canon to which he gave his attestation. And in regard to the New Testament it is manifest that we have not, in the first instance, any certain means of ascertaining or establishing what are the particular books which are entitled to a place there, except by some investigation of the historical evidence as to the actual matter of fact with regard to their origin and authorship. The question of inspiration is one of revelation, *i.e.* God has made known to us in the Word itself the true character, origin, and authority of that word as the production of his Spirit through the instrumentality of men who wrote as they were moved by him. But he has not given us in this word itself, as he might have done had it so pleased him, any explicit information as to what the particular works are from which his whole revealed will is to be learned. He has given sufficient means of ascertaining this;

¹ See Alexander on *The Canon*, pp. 125-128, and Gaussen, pp. 319, 320.

though it is in some measure through the help of erudition, *i.e.* through the study of the historical evidence, while to those who study aright the Word itself, although they may have no erudition, he opens up by his Spirit abundant and convincing manifestations of his presence and his power, and satisfies them that he is in it of a truth.

The objection of the Papists,¹ that to establish the canon in this way is to place our reliance upon the authority of the church, and thereby to concede their great principle, has already been considered and answered by shewing that we concede no authority, properly so called, to the church in the matter, but merely make use of the materials furnished by the writings of the early Christian authors, upon the ordinary recognised principles of evidence, for establishing certain matters of historical fact from which some important conclusions are rationally deduced.

We have already had occasion to mention and to characterise the principal works in which the subject of the canon in general is discussed, and in which the grounds are set forth by which the claims of the apocryphal books, both of the Old and of the New Testament, to a place in the canon are disproved. The details of the historical evidence by which the claims of each canonical book to the place it occupies are established, are to be found most easily, along with other useful matter, in that important and valuable class of works usually known by the names of Introductions or Keys to the Scriptures:—Carpsovius, Pritius; Gray and Percy; Mill's *Prolegomena*; Basnage, *Histoire de l'Eglise*, lect. viii.; Storr and Flatt; Knapp's *Lectures*; Michaelis and Hug; Horne, 4th vol.

¹ This objection is adopted also in substance by the Tractarians, who say that we depend upon the received traditions both for our canon and our creed.



LECTURE XXXVI.

RULE OF FAITH—GENERAL PRINCIPLES—POPERY AND TRACTARIANISM.

SOME of the topics which we have been lately considering are intimately connected with the important subject of the rule of faith, or the standard by which we know and ascertain the revealed will of God, or rather may be said to form a part of it. In establishing the divine origin, authority, and inspiration of the sacred Scriptures, we exclude or disprove the authority of human reason as the rule or standard of what we ought to believe, in the sense in which its supremacy has been often contended for. If the whole Bible be the word of God, proceeding from him, and written by men as they were moved and directed by his Spirit, then of course it possesses supreme and infallible authority; there can be no legitimate appeal from its statements to the deductions or conclusions of human reason, the reason of man must be exercised only in ascertaining its true meaning, and everything which it is found to declare must be received and submitted to as certainly true, because it is the declaration of Him who is infallible and who cannot lie. The Socinians deny the inspiration of the Bible, and they virtually maintain that human reason is the standard of truth, the rule of faith, entitled to judge, to some extent at least, how far even the admitted doctrines of Scripture are to be received; and there is an intimate connection between their denial of the one and their maintenance of the other. They deny the inspiration of the Scripture that they may have room for the supremacy of reason, not merely in ascertaining what is taught in the Bible, but in deciding upon its truth or falsehood. The doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible at once precludes all

their views as to the province and functions of human reason in the investigation of religious truth, practically restricts it to the ascertaining of what is the true meaning of the statements of Scripture, and imposes an absolute and imperative obligation to receive as infallibly true whatever the Bible really declares.

Another important step is taken towards settling the subject of the rule of faith, when we have ascertained what the books are, to the exclusion of all others, which were given by inspiration of God, and given by him to the church as his Word; when we have shewn that the books which are usually received as canonical by Protestants, and these alone, to the exclusion of the apocryphal books added to the canon by the Council of Trent, and received by the Church of Rome, constitute those sacred writings which the Spirit of God inspired. We have seen that these are books which not only contain a divine revelation, but are themselves the word of God, dictated by his Spirit, or at least owing their origin to his agency in such a sense and to such an extent as be free from all error, and therefore to be implicitly submitted to whenever their meaning is ascertained; and we have settled what these books are. It would seem now that the only question that remained to be discussed, if indeed there was any great room for discussion about it, was, how may the meaning of these divinely inspired books be most easily and most certainly ascertained? But before we proceed to the consideration of this subject, we have still some important matters to attend to connected with the question what it is that forms or constitutes the rule of faith. There are still some errors upon this subject that must be examined and removed out of the way. The apostate Church of Rome, which is the grand adversary of Christ and of true Christianity, has corrupted the rule of faith, not only by adding the apocryphal books to the word of God, but by introducing, in addition even to their own enlarged canon of Scripture, another and different source or means of knowing the divine will, viz., tradition, or what her most distinguished writers call the unwritten, as distinguished from the written, word of God. And this subject is the more important in the present day, because the views of the Romish Church, in nearly all their extent and grossness, have been taken up and publicly advocated by a large and influential body in our own country, who have imbibed all the fundamental principles of

Popery, while many of them still continue ministers of a church which, though certainly the most imperfectly reformed of all the reformed churches, unquestionably exhibits in its symbolical books a decided protest against Popery, and which has rendered some important services to the cause of Protestant truth by the masterly and invaluable works against Popery which many of its ministers have produced. The Tractarians indeed, as they are commonly called, affect to point out some distinction between their views and those of the Church of Rome in regard to the rule of faith, as well as in regard to most other points. But those distinctions are in general slight and insignificant, and when called upon to defend themselves against the charge of Popery, they have not scrupled to have recourse to unfair if not dishonest misrepresentations of their own opinions, and even in some instances those of the Papists—a course rendered necessary by the resolution on which many of them continue to act, of adhering to the communion of the Church of England. They have just as explicitly denied the perfection or sufficiency and perspicuity of the Scriptures as ever Papists did, and they have laboured to establish their unfitness, because of their imperfection and obscurity, to be the only rule of faith, or even properly speaking, to be a rule of faith at all by themselves, and without tradition, and they have done this by the very same arguments which have been employed by the champions of Popery. They have again and again asserted in the most explicit terms that Scripture and tradition are together or jointly the rule of faith, and they have made many statements which plainly imply that they really attach more weight and importance to tradition than to Scripture in making men acquainted with God's will—statements which may be all regarded as comprehended in or deducible from one of their favourite maxims, viz., that tradition teaches and Scripture proves. By this maxim they mean to convey this idea, that it is chiefly from tradition that men actually learn what is the will of God, and that after they have learned it from tradition, they may then, to a considerable extent, prove or confirm it from the Scripture.

There are two points on which the Tractarians have attempted to shew that their views differ from those of the Church of Rome in regard to the rule of faith. First, they say that the Church of

Rome holds tradition to be co-ordinate with the Scriptures, whereas they regard it as subordinate to the Scriptures. It is certainly true that the Church of Rome holds tradition to be co-ordinate with the Scripture; and indeed the substance of the charge adduced against the Church of Rome on this point is that, in the language of the decree of the Council of Trent, session 4, she receives and venerates the Scripture and tradition "*pàri pietatis affectu ac reverentia.*" But it is not true that the Tractarians regard tradition as subordinate to the Scripture; and the allegation to this effect, made by Dr Pusey in his letter to the Bishop of Oxford in answer to the charge of Popery, is a very discreditable, if not a positively dishonest misrepresentation. They openly maintain that tradition, or Catholic consent, as they sometimes call it, is an infallible divine informant, *i.e.* conveys to men from God truths which it is important for them to know, and which, being conveyed by tradition, though not contained in Scripture, are binding upon men's consciences, so that to reject them is sinful. They expressly declare that Scripture and tradition do, jointly and together, make up the rule of faith; and not to dwell upon those statements in which they virtually and practically put tradition above Scripture, it is plain from those fundamental positions which they openly and explicitly maintain, that they invest it with an authority co-ordinate with that of the written word, as an equally authentic mode of conveying truth from God, which, because it comes from him, men are equally bound to receive and submit to. That traditions which are contrary to Scripture are not to be received, is a position which is just as readily conceded in theory by the Papists as by the Tractarians, and which is only a little more flagrantly disregarded by them in practice. The second point in which the Tractarians have attempted to shew that there is a difference between their views upon the subject of the rule of faith and those of the Church of Rome is, that they admit that the Scripture contains, more or less clearly, everything which it is necessary for men's salvation to know and believe, while the Church of Rome, they allege, denies this. But it is not true that the Church of Rome denies this. Its denial of it is not necessarily involved in any doctrine to which the Church of Rome is pledged, and it has been distinctly admitted by many of her leading writers. The doctrine of the Church of Rome necessarily implies that there

are truths not contained in Scripture which are conveyed to us by tradition, and that *these* truths are quite as binding upon the consciences of those to whom they are propounded, as those contained in the Bible, and all this is explicitly asserted by the Tractarians; but the doctrine of the Church of Rome does not necessarily imply more than this, and it is a fact notorious to those who are acquainted with Popish controversialists, and could scarcely be unknown to the Tractarians when they brought forward this pretence, that Cardinal Bellarmine and many other defenders of Popery have distinctly admitted that the written word contains everything which it is absolutely necessary for men's salvation to know and believe. This concession is no doubt practically contradicted by the general strain of teaching ordinarily exhibited in Popish writers; but this is equally true of the Tractarians. They have afforded good ground to suspect that they have made this concession just because it is required by the Articles of the Church of England, and it is rather a curious and instructive coincidence, that the occasion on which Bellarmine makes this concession most fully is not when he is stating the general question or discussing it abstractly, but when he is called to consider and answer the clear testimonies produced by Protestant writers from the Fathers in support of the perfection and sufficiency of the Scriptures. It was these testimonies that produced this concession, which he would probably have withheld if he could have given any plausible perversion of the mass of patristic testimonies, just as it is the Sixth Article of the Church of England which has wrung this same concession from the Tractarians. There is good reason to suspect that they would have withheld it if they could; and, at any rate, it is plain that they cannot truly and honestly adduce it as a point in which they differ from the Church of Rome. The Church of Rome is not pledged to any doctrine which obliges her of necessity to deny that the written word contains everything which it is necessary for men's salvation to know and believe. Both Papists and Tractarians concede this in theory, and both equally give pretty plain indications that they would have withheld the concession, unless the exigencies of their situation had compelled them to make it.

The only point connected with the way and manner of acquiring a certain knowledge of the divine will on which the Tractarians and the Papists really differ is one which, though

closely connected with the subject of the rule of faith, does not strictly and properly form a part of it, viz., the infallibility of the church.

The Tractarians are indeed nearly as much opposed to the right of private judgment as the Papists, and they often talk of church authority, and the respect that is due to it, in a very Popish style ; but they have not yet ventured openly and explicitly to proclaim infallibility as a permanent attribute of the church. They have been restrained from doing this chiefly, it would appear, from there being no church to which they could very decently or consistently ascribe this important property or privilege of infallibility —no church to which they could well regard it as attaching. To concede it to the Church of Rome would of course imply, that they should immediately join her communion, for which many of them are not yet fully prepared, though some of the most able, learned, and honest among them have taken this step. To ascribe it to the Anglican Church, as they love to call it, would be a little too preposterous ; and besides, it is well known that they are not altogether satisfied with the position and constitution of this same Anglican Church. They are not quite sure but that ever since the Reformation she has been in a condition of schism, and they are pretty confident that at that memorable era, she was tempted, through the influence of the continental Reformers, to lay aside some important Catholic principles. In consequence of this great practical difficulty, viz., the want of a subject to which the property of infallibility could be safely and decently ascribed, they are obliged in the meantime, though apparently very much against their will, to abstain from asserting infallibility as a permanent attribute of the church. In all essential points then concerning the rule of faith, the Tractarians agree with the Papists, and are utterly unable to make out any true or tangible distinction. They agree with them in denying the perfection and sufficiency of the Scriptures or written word as the only rule of faith, and their perspicuity in teaching some important doctrines, of which it is admitted that they contain some hints or notices ; and they agree with them in maintaining the necessity and importance of tradition as conveying to us some important truths which are not taught in Scripture, but which, as coming from God through the channel of tradition, are binding upon men's consciences as a part of the divine rule of

faith and practice. We wish you then distinctly to understand that whatever errors we may have occasion to expose in treating of the rule of faith, are errors which are now maintained equally at Oxford and at Rome, equally by the Anglo-Catholics, as the Tractarians often call themselves, and by the ordinary Papists who openly acknowledge the man of sin as their master. Since I have been led to advert to this subject, I may take this opportunity of mentioning that the Tractarians have closely followed the Papists in labouring to undermine and overthrow all the ordinary rational grounds of knowledge or certainty in regard to religious truth, and have given much countenance, just as the Papists have done, to the common infidel or Socinian objections about proving against opponents the divine authority and inspiration of the sacred Scriptures, and establishing the canonical authority of the books which compose them, and have exaggerated the difficulties attending the certain discovery of their true meaning. They are just as unscrupulous in throwing down the ordinary rational grounds of our knowledge upon these important subjects, that they may establish the authority of tradition or Catholic consent, *i.e.* as they explain it, the authority of the church of the fourth and fifth centuries, as the Papists are in labouring to effect the same object that they may establish the authority of the Church of Rome.

The Tractarians are perpetually declaiming against what they call rationalism; they dishonestly comprehend under this designation at once Calvinism and Socinianism, evangelical and infidel principles, everything which refuses to receive as handed down from the apostles, all the childish drivelling and superstitious folly, all the heresy and corruption of the fifth century, while all the time they are themselves betraying the cause of truly rational and scriptural religion, as far as they can, into the hands of infidels and sceptics. It is one of the most remarkable features of Popery that both directly and indirectly it tends so much to promote the cause of infidelity, and that many of its defenders are so ready and willing to take up and to urge infidel objections against the foundations of our faith, and Socinian objections against the great doctrines of Scripture; and there is some satisfaction, though it is of a painful kind, in finding that tractarianism has this broad seal of Satan, this most distinct and unequivocal mark of the beast stamped upon it, and that it thus affords the most conclusive evidence

that whatever appearances of piety some of its leading promoters may exhibit, the system itself is, like Popery, to be ascribed to the agency of the father of lies ; that it is indebted to him for its extraordinary success, and is employed by him for the accomplishment of his purposes. The word of God tells us that Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, and the history of the church informs us that he has often employed for corrupting the truth as it is in Jesus, and for effecting results most injurious to the welfare of true religion, men who had much appearance of piety and devoutness.

You will find abundant proof of the truth of the representation which has now been given of the views and principles of the Tractarians, a thorough exposure of their unfair dealing in misrepresenting the sentiments of the Fathers and of the divines of the Church of England, and a great amount of important discussion and valuable information about this whole subject of the rule of faith in the modern Tractarian aspect of it, in an admirable work published a few years ago in two volumes by the Rev. William Goode, a minister of the Church of England in London, entitled *The Divine Rule of Faith and Practice* ; and you will find a very masterly exhibition and exposure of the principles of these men, upon this and other subjects, in a little work on *The Tracts for the Times*, by my much esteemed friend Dr James Buchanan of this city.

The doctrine of our church upon this subject, in accordance with that of most other Protestant churches, is thus set forth in the sixth section of the first chapter of our Confession : “ The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture, unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men ; ” and the doctrine of Papists and Tractarians, as set forth by the decree of the fourth session of the Council of Trent is this : “ That the truth which Christ at first proclaimed with his own mouth, and afterwards ordered to be preached by his apostles to every creature, is contained in written books and in unwritten traditions ; which traditions, being received by the apostles from Christ’s own mouth, or being delivered by the apostles themselves under the inspiration of

the Holy Spirit, have reached us, and that therefore the books of the Old and New Testaments, and these traditions, as having proceeded from Christ's mouth, or having been dictated by the Holy Spirit, and preserved in unbroken succession in the Catholic Church, are to be received and respected with an equal feeling of piety and reverence." The statement of the truth upon this point quoted from our Confession does not *formally* refer to the important distinction to which we have been led to advert, between those things which are necessary to salvation and those which are not; and yet it plainly teaches not only that those things which are necessary to salvation are contained in the Scriptures, or may be deduced from them, but also that everything which men are under *an obligation* to believe and practise is to be found there. The subject of the proposition is "the whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life." It is of course universally admitted that everything which God has revealed or enjoined, it is necessary in some sense for men to believe and to do; in other words, they are at least under an imperative obligation to believe or to do it. But it does not follow that *it is necessary for men's salvation* to believe or to do everything which God may have revealed or enjoined; in other words, that every degree of ignorance or mistake as to what God may have revealed or enjoined prevents men's salvation. There may be things which, in the words of the Confession, "are necessary for faith and life," *i.e.* which men are under an obligation to believe and to do, because God has revealed them, and which therefore ought to form a part of their belief and practice, which yet may not be necessary for their salvation, *i.e.* ignorance or mistake about which may not exclude them from the kingdom of heaven. And consequently, when the Confession speaks of the whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, it comprehends under this description everything which God has revealed or enjoined, everything which men, from regard to God's authority, are under an obligation to believe or to do, whether it be in the *sense above explained* necessary to their salvation or not; and of all those things it asserts, that they are contained in Scripture either expressly, or by good and necessary consequence.

Although Bellarmine and other Papists have been compelled by

the force of the clear testimonies of the Fathers to concede, in general terms, that all things necessary for men's salvation are contained more or less plainly in Scripture, so that there is nothing the ignorance or unbelief of which will exclude men from salvation about which there is not some information in the Bible, yet it is a common practice of Papists to raise many difficulties about things necessary or fundamental, difficulties as to what the truths are which are necessary or fundamental, and as to how they are to be known or distinguished from others. The subject is one attended with some difficulty, but the discussion of it is more closely connected with the head of the clearness or perspicuity of the Scriptures in all necessary or fundamental points, as asserted in the next section of the Confession, than with that which we are at present to consider, which is the perfection or sufficiency of the Scriptures. I may just mention however in passing, that an important distinction has been laid down by some authors upon this subject, which, though it does not clear away the difficulties of the question by enabling us to distinguish with anything like precision between fundamentals and non-fundamentals, between truths which are necessary to be known and believed for man's salvation and those which in the sense above explained are not, yet gives a clear and impressive conception of the general nature and character of the distinction. Fundamental truths, it has been said, are those which have been revealed by God, because it was necessary for man's salvation that they should be known and believed; and non-fundamentals are those which it is necessary for men, or rather incumbent upon them, to know and believe, just because they have been revealed. But the doctrine with which we have at present to do is this, that both these classes of truths, all the truths which men are under any obligation to know, believe, and practise, in virtue of God having revealed them, and not merely those which are necessary to salvation in this sense—that ignorance and unbelief of them excludes from the kingdom of heaven—are so revealed by God in the Scriptures, are contained in the written word, and are to be sought and found nowhere else. Papists and Tractarians agree with us in holding that there is nothing which it is binding upon men's consciences to believe and to do, except what God has revealed and enjoined, and in regard to everything which they call upon men to believe and to do, even they profess

to produce some evidence that it came from God ; and accordingly Papists are accustomed to call the traditions which they require men to receive and to venerate the unwritten word of God, as distinguished from the written word, which is the Bible. The question then properly respects the channel or channels through which the will of God regarding faith and practice is conveyed. Papists do not require men to give their assent to any truths without professing to produce some evidence that the truths came from God, and are based upon his authority ; and Protestants, upon the other hand, profess themselves ever ready and willing to receive with implicit submission all truths which can be proved by any competent satisfactory evidence to have come from that source to be based on divine authority. Protestants, however, contend that in point of fact we have not now any other authentic and satisfactory means of ascertaining what was revealed and enjoined by Christ and his apostles, except the sacred Scriptures. Papists and Tractarians maintain that there are doctrines and commands given to men by Christ and his apostles which have been conveyed to us by a different channel from the Scriptures, but one equally authentic and satisfactory, viz., tradition ; and that these therefore it is equally our duty to receive and obey. In short, Protestants hold the written word to be the sole and only rule of faith and practice ; Papists and Tractarians admit it to be a rule, but not the only one, or rather they admit it to be a part of the rule, but not the whole of it.

There is by universal admission one authentic means or channel of conveying to us God's will—by the written word. Is there any other ? Protestants say there is not. Papists and Tractarians say there is—by tradition. Our doctrine is, that all things which God has revealed and enjoined, all things which he has laid us under an obligation to believe or to do, “are either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.” This latter clause, asserting the warrantableness and obligation of Scripture consequences, as they are sometimes called, is added partly to guard against some cavils and objections of the Papists, and partly because it declares an important truth bearing upon the right use and interpretation of Scripture. Papists might say to us with some plausibility, you profess to believe nothing but which is contained in Scripture,

and yet you hold many doctrines which you cannot point out to us as expressly asserted in the pages of God's word. Now, we must admit this ; but we still contend, that though not expressly set down in Scripture, they may be deduced from it, by good and necessary consequence ; in other words, that the Scriptures, when carefully examined, when rightly used and fairly applied, contain sufficient materials for shewing that the doctrines we hold are really taught there, and that the Scriptures were intended to teach them ; and this is quite sufficient to answer the objection. It is enough that we can prove in regard to any doctrine we hold, that the Scripture rightly understood and fairly applied affords sufficient materials for believing it, and therefore lays upon us an obligation in right reason to admit it. We have the example of our Saviour himself in interpreting Scripture to sanction the doctrine of Scripture consequences, to warrant, nay to require us to believe much that is not expressly set down, but may be deduced by good and necessary consequence. It is remarkable that in most of his interpretations of Scripture as recorded in the inspired histories of his life, he founded his arguments upon a consequence, upon what was not expressly set down in the words quoted, but might be fairly deduced from them. And we have no doubt that our Saviour's conduct in this matter was intended to impress upon us this most important general lesson, viz., that by a careful study and a close examination of the Bible, we may learn from it a great deal more than what appears at first view and upon the surface, and thus be enabled to use it much more habitually than is commonly supposed, as a light unto our feet and a lamp unto our path, and to find in it a much more complete directory than we usually expect or discover for regulating our opinions and our conduct.

[Two other purposes to which an objection to Scripture consequence has been applied—first, Papists in the way of calling for an express Scripture declaration against their errors ; and second, by Latitudinarians and English dissenters in opposing creeds, &c., except in Scripture words.]

LECTURE XXXVII.

PERFECTION AND SUFFICIENCY OF THE SCRIPTURE : SCRIPTURAL EVIDENCE FOR IT, POPISH ARGUMENTS AGAINST IT.

THIS then is the doctrine which Protestants maintain upon this subject ; and we have now to advert to the evidence on which it rests, usually discussed by divines under the head of the perfection or sufficiency of the Scriptures, as a branch of the general subject of the rule of faith. And here it is proper to consider, in the first place, whether the Scriptures themselves give us any information upon the subject, *i.e.* whether they tell us anything as to the source or sources from which the will of God is to be learned, anything as to their own completeness and sufficiency as to the object they were intended to serve, and their actual fitness for accomplishing it. Some Popish writers object to our seeking for evidence on this point in the statements of Scripture, upon the ground that, as it is the character of Scripture that is the point in question, the Scripture should not be heard, or at least its decision should not be held conclusive, in its own cause. This would be a fair enough objection in the mouth of an infidel, in regard to any matter which we were discussing with him as an infidel ; but no one professing to believe that the Bible is the word of God, and has proceeded from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, could ever produce such an objection, unless he were a Papist or a Tractarian. Papists and Protestants concur in holding that the Bible is the word of God, that all its statements come from him, and are in their right meaning infallibly true. The Scripture therefore forms a sort of common ground on which they can meet and discuss their differences. It is a standard the authority of which both parties

acknowledge; and not only therefore are they both bound to admit as true whatever it is found to declare, concerning itself or concerning anything, but Protestants moreover are entitled to demand, upon the ground of the Popish admission that the Bible is the word of God, and so far a rule of faith—though, as Papists think, not the only one—that Papists shall produce from the Bible full warrant for the divine origin and authority of anything else which they may regard as a part of the rule of faith. We shewed you how, even at an earlier stage in the general argument, we were entitled to appeal to the statements of Scripture itself in regard to its inspiration, and bound to assent to the doctrine which we shewed you it taught, viz., that this inspiration was plenary, and not partial, and that it extended to the words as well as to the sentiments. It is still more plain that we are entitled to appeal to, and bound to be guarded by, the declarations of Scripture, if there are any, concerning its own perfection and sufficiency, as revealing the whole counsel of God, when our views upon this subject are contested by men who agree with us in believing that the Scriptures are all given by divine inspiration, and that all that they assert is true. Now, it may be admitted that we have not such express and direct declarations in Scripture in proof of its own perfection, completeness, or sufficiency, as the only rule of faith, as we have of its plenary inspiration; but we have quite enough stated there from which, either expressly or by good and necessary consequence, the conclusion may be reached that it contains the whole counsel of God. The passage in Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy, which, as we formerly shewed you, contains so clear and explicit a testimony in favour of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, contains also statements which establish, though not quite so directly, this perfection and sufficiency (iii. 15–17). Here it is expressly asserted that the Scriptures of the Old Testament were able to make men wise unto salvation. Of course the statement must apply *a fortiori* to the whole Bible. Now, there is a sense, as we formerly explained to you, in which Papists and Tractarians admit that the Bible contains everything which it is necessary for man's salvation to believe and to do, and therefore it may seem as if the passage contained no solid argument against their views. But the sense in which they admit this is based upon a distinction which has grown out of modern speculations

and controversies, and which manifestly was not present to the mind of the apostle when he wrote this declaration, and could not have occurred to Timothy when he read it. The apostle manifestly had here no reference whatever to the distinction between those things which were necessary for men's salvation in this sense, that ignorance of them or error concerning them excluded them from salvation, and these things which, though not necessary for men's salvation in this sense, it was yet obligatory upon men by God's authority to believe and to do. It is very evident from the nature of the case, and from the general character and scope of the statement, that when the apostle asserted that the sacred Scriptures were able to make men wise unto salvation, he meant, without reference to any such distinction, to convey this idea, that they were amply sufficient to serve the whole purposes for which God had made a revelation of himself to men, with a view to their salvation, and that there was nothing else about which a man desiring and seeking his salvation need concern himself as a source of knowledge and guidance. The same conclusion is also fairly deducible from the sixteenth and seventeenth verses, where divinely inspired Scripture is not only declared to be profitable for certain purposes, which comprehend everything for which a revelation of God's will has been given to men, but where we are further told that it was designed to effect, and of course is amply sufficient to effect, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work. If the Scripture was intended by God to effect this object, and consequently fitted by him for its accomplishment, then men need have no doubt or hesitation about adopting the conclusion that in the Bible they have the whole counsel of God revealed for their salvation, and that while it is incumbent upon them to believe and to do all that is there declared and enjoined, God has put them under no obligation to believe or to do anything with a view to their salvation which is not to be found there revealed and imposed.

There are other passages of Scripture which were plainly intended to convey the same general idea, that the written word contains the whole counsel of God, was intended to be a complete and sufficient rule of faith and practice, and is amply adequate for accomplishing all the objects which a revelation of God's will was intended to serve, such as Deut. iv. 1, 2; Isa. viii. 20; John xx.

30, 31 ; Acts xvii. 11, &c. Papists have tried to elude the force of these texts by explaining them away, and seeking to throw difficulties in the way of their establishing the conclusions which they obviously suggest. But it has been fully shewn by Protestant writers that they have not been able to give them any solid or satisfactory answer. Papists do not pretend to find in Scripture any statement which directly or by implication denies the perfection and sufficiency of the Bible, as containing the whole counsel of God. But they have brought forward some considerations of a general kind, which they allege militate against its being the only rule of faith. Bellarmine adduces the *occasional* character of many of the books which compose the New Testament, as an objection to the Protestant doctrine upon this subject, *i.e.* the fact that some of the epistles were written as it were *pro re nata*, to serve some temporary or local purpose. This is in a certain sense true as a matter of fact, and Papists infer from it that writings which were in some sense suggested by, and primarily designed to effect some local or temporary object, could not have been intended by God to be a complete permanent rule to the church. Here, as everywhere else in regard to the rule of faith, there is a perfect harmony between the views of the Papists and the Tractarians. Now, it is worthy of notice, that the fact here founded on by the Papists and the Tractarians is, as you might suppose, one of which latitudinarian and semi-infidel divines make much use, and which is in special favour with the German rationalists. These men employ it for the purpose of shewing that a considerable portion of the New Testament was so entirely local and temporary in its design or object, that it is of little or no use to us, contains little that we have any concern in, and that it may be explained, or explained away, by a reference to the local or temporary peculiarities in which it seems to have originated. This notion has been very extensively and very mischievously applied by continental writers to the interpretation of the New Testament, under the name of what many of them call the historical sense of Scripture. But we have to do with it at present merely in so far as it is made the basis of the Papist and Tractarian inference in regard to the perfection and sufficiency of the Scriptures in general. And with reference to this point, it is very manifest that the fact of *some* of the epistles having been in some sense suggested by

local or temporary circumstances does not, considering that they are admitted to have been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, afford any ground for the conclusion that they do not afford any materials fitted to guide and direct us—a conclusion which if true would only tend to shew that they ought not to have formed part of the canon at all—and still less, if possible, for the conclusion that they, along with the other books of Scripture, which were not written occasionally, or *pro re nata*, do not contain the whole revelation by which God intended to provide for the permanent regulation of the church, and to guide men to the knowledge and enjoyment of himself. This is sufficient to prove that the Popish and Tractarian inference from it is unfounded; but it is proper before leaving this topic to observe that we have a striking instance of the goodness and wisdom of God in employing and overruling the temporary and local circumstances in which in a certain sense some of these epistles had their origin, for producing works fitted permanently to instruct and edify the church of Christ; and that in the humble and prayerful study of the apostolic epistles we can see how admirably fitted they are to serve at once a temporary and a permanent, a local and a universal object. If they were intended to have a place in the canon at all—and this of course Papists and Tractarians concede—then they must have been designed by God, and are therefore fitted, to serve permanent and universal, as well as temporary and local purposes. We can see that this is really the case when we carefully examine them, and if they are fitted and intended to serve permanently as a part of the word of God, and therefore as a part of the rule of faith and practice, there can be no possible ground in the circumstance of their having originated in some sense in a local and temporary cause, for denying or even doubting that they *along with the other books of Scripture* may contain the whole counsel of God, the whole of the revelation by which he intended to guide men to the knowledge, worship, and enjoyment of himself.

Bellarmino has another general argument to prove that the books of the New Testament were not intended to convey the whole of the information which God designed to communicate to the church concerning the Christian system. It is this, that if the apostles had intended to convey to us in writing the whole of what was necessary and profitable, they would have written a catechism

or some such summary of the Christian religion, and would all have united together in preparing some joint writing, just as it is certain, he says, that they all united together in composing the creed, which however they did not write, but delivered *viva voce* (lib. iv. chap. 4). I do not recollect that the Tractarians have formally and directly adduced this as an argument in support of the imperfection and insufficiency which they ascribe to the written Word; but they have shewn their full sympathy with the general spirit and scope of the objection by the importance which they attach to the creed, by ascribing it, in the face of undoubted historical evidence, to the apostles, and by distinctly declaring it to be a part of the divine rule of faith. You will find a very curious and instructive exposure of their conduct in this matter in the fourth chapter of Goode's *Divine Rule of Faith and Practice*,¹ and you will see that it is not unworthy of accomplished Jesuits. The argument itself is a mere piece of folly and presumption. It is a pure begging of the whole question, for it plainly assumes that the Scriptures are not fitted to be a sufficient or complete rule of faith, because they contain no formal creed, catechism, or general summary; and from this assumed insufficiency or imperfection of the Scriptures, it draws the inference that they were not really intended to serve that purpose. And while it thus manifestly assumes the point in dispute, it presumes to dictate to God how the Scriptures must have been composed, and what they must have contained, in order to render them adequate to serve the purpose for which they themselves tell us that God designed them.

While the Papists do not allege that the Scriptures contain any statements which deny their own perfection and sufficiency, or assert their own imperfection and insufficiency, they contend that they afford materials for the conclusion that they are themselves imperfect and insufficient, by sending us to other sources for authentic and infallible information concerning the divine will, viz., to tradition and to the church. If this position were established, it would afford them some ground for their doctrine, that the written word is not the only rule of faith, the only source from which the will of God revealed for men's salvation may be certainly

¹ Title of the chapter, "That there are no writings extant entitled to the name of apostolical traditions but the canonical Scriptures."

learned, the only source from which an obligation may be deduced as to what we are to believe and to do. This is a favourite notion with Popish writers, some of whom, after being constrained to concede that in some sense the Scriptures may be said to contain all that is necessary for salvation, virtually retract or explain away the concession, by saying that they contain all that is necessary, either in their own statements, or by sending us to tradition and the church for whatever more may be necessary in order to form a complete rule of faith and practice. It is with tradition only we have at present to do, the church will be afterwards considered.

The main proof which they commonly adduce that the Scripture authorises unwritten traditions, and sends us to them for authentic information concerning God's will is, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or by our epistle" (2 Thess. ii. 15). Now, this proves that the Thessalonians, and of course other churches, were just as much bound to submit and adhere to the oral as to the written instructions of the apostles. It proves this, but it proves nothing more. Nothing more can be deduced from it by good and necessary consequence. Now, this is a position which no Protestant disputes, and which does not in the least aid the Popish cause. There is nothing here which affords the slightest ground for believing that the oral instructions delivered by the apostles were intended to be preserved and handed down for the future guidance of the church. That they were binding upon all to whom they were addressed is unquestionable, but this proves nothing as to their intended future permanent use and destination. We are still perfectly willing to receive and submit to everything, in regard to which we have reasonable evidence set before us that the apostles delivered it as matter of public instruction to the churches. The Thessalonians knew what traditions the apostles had orally delivered to them. They had conclusive evidence that they came from him, and this was enough. They were bound to hold them fast. Let the Papists, or the Tractarians, or any sect, produce any traditions, and produce at the same time sufficient and satisfactory evidence that these traditions were delivered by the apostles as matters of public instruction to the churches, and we will at once submit to them, and receive them as part of our rule of faith.

But as the Scriptures lead us to expect to find the will of God in the written word, as they give no hint that we are to find it anywhere else, and especially never hint that it was to be conveyed from generation to generation by oral tradition, we do not feel ourselves called upon to be at much pains in searching for any oral traditions of what was taught by Christ and his apostles; and we do feel ourselves bound to insist that anything which is pressed upon us, as a tradition handed down from Christ and his apostles, shall in each particular case be accompanied with satisfactory evidence that it did proceed from them. We ask this, we ask for nothing more; and from a regard to our own character as rational beings, as well as deference for the authority of Scripture, we can be satisfied with nothing less. There are two or three other passages of a similar import in the apostolic epistles, which are also usually quoted by the Papists in support of tradition, but they imply nothing more than this, that the churches were bound to receive and adhere to all the oral traditions which the apostles had delivered to them. The only other thing which the Papists have to adduce in support of their allegation that the Scriptures send us to tradition for authentic information as to God's will, is the fact indicated by Scripture that Christ and his apostles spoke much in the way of public instruction that is not contained in the written word. This is quite true, but nothing to the purpose. We say again, Let them produce *any of these things*, and prove that they proceeded from Christ and his apostles, and we will at once submit to them. The question, whether or not any such traditions have been in fact preserved, and can now be produced and satisfactorily established to have come from Christ and his apostles, will be afterwards adverted to; but it is enough in the meantime, and with reference to the present argument, to observe that the Scripture, while it affords ground to believe that much instruction was given by Christ and his apostles which is not recorded in the Bible, gives us no hint that it was to be preserved and handed down by tradition, but on the contrary gives us good reason for the conviction that the written word not only contains all that is necessary to guide men individually to salvation, but all by which God intended to provide for the future permanent instruction and edification of his church, and thought necessary for the attainment of that end. The Papists allege that the Scriptures them-

selves send us to tradition, and send us to the church, for authentic information as to the will of God. But the general character of the proofs they adduce in support of one part of this allegation differs materially from that of those brought forward in support of the other. With regard to the church they can shew that our attention is directed to it in Scripture as a permanent thing, that statements are made there with respect to its duties and functions concerning the truth, that some respect is to be paid to its authority, and that promises are made as to Christ's presence with it, and its consequent permanence and sufficiency for the accomplishment of certain important objects. If the Popish interpretation of the declarations and promises of Scripture concerning the church be correct, then they establish the church's infallibility in declaring the will of God, and of course would impose upon us a valid obligation to receive its decisions, if we knew what they were, and where they were to be found, as certainly declaring the mind of God. But these proofs that the Scripture sends us to tradition to learn the divine will from it as a part of the rule of faith, have not even the appearance of establishing the point for which they are adduced. They prove merely that Christ and his apostles delivered instructions which are not recorded in Scripture, and that the men and the churches to whom these oral instructions were addressed—and we admit it follows by good and necessary consequence, all to whom they are at any time propounded, accompanied with satisfactory evidence that they came from Christ and his apostles—are bound to receive them. Now, all this may be safely admitted, and does not enable the Papists to advance a single step towards proving that the written word does not now contain the whole counsel of God, or that there are still any other truths resting on God's authority which are not contained in the sacred writings, but have been authentically conveyed to us in some other way.

There is another consideration, much insisted upon by Papists, to prove that the written word is not the only rule of faith, though indeed it is scarcely deserving of notice. It is this, that there was no written revelation for more than 2000 years after the creation of the world, till the time of Moses, and that during the apostolic age the rule of faith was not written, but oral; and they labour to build upon these facts a presumption against the perfec-

tion and sufficiency of the written word, and in favour of the sufficiency of oral tradition. But these facts are really nothing to the purpose, and afford no ground for any such inferences. The question is not what means God may have been pleased to give to other ages of knowing his will, but what means he has been pleased to give to us. The rapidity with which the knowledge of the one true God, when left to oral tradition, disappeared from the world, and the extent to which, even in a very early age, idolatry prevailed among men, notwithstanding the great age to which the patriarchs attained, and the consequently small number of hands through which the traditionary knowledge of God and of true religion passed, does certainly not afford any satisfactory evidence of the value or sufficiency of oral tradition for transmitting from generation to generation a knowledge even of the most simple and elementary truths, even of those great truths, the evidence of which has a clear foundation in the nature of man and in the external universe. It was a great privilege which God gave to his ancient people when he imparted to them a written revelation of his will; and we have certainly no reason to think that they acted in a way that was acceptable to him or beneficial to themselves, when they added to that written word oral traditions. God may preserve some knowledge of himself among men without a written revelation; but it is in entire accordance with the universal experience of men, that authentic instruction as to what men should think and do will be more accurately and more certainly preserved when committed to writing than when merely handed down from generation to generation by oral tradition. And the act of God in giving us a written revelation abundantly confirms this position. It was indeed some time after the establishment of the Christian system, *i.e.* after Christ's ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit, before the books which compose the New Testament were written. But even during this interval, as we learn from the passage to which we have adverted in Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy, the sacred writings of the Old Testament were able to make men wise unto salvation through faith which was in Christ Jesus. And no time was lost in making provision for preparing an authentic written revelation, and before the first generation passed away, putting the truth of God concerning the most important of all his dispensations to man beyond the reach

of the risks and hazards to which its being consigned to tradition would have subjected it. We know, both from statements contained in the New Testament itself, and from authentic ecclesiastical history, that the apostles were led, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in order to make provision for the future instruction and edification of the church after they should be taken away, to commit the history of the life and discourses of their Master, and the substance of their own oral instructions, to written records. All that they wrote with this view, under the guidance of God's Spirit, has, in his good providence, been preserved—though this is denied by all Papists, and by some others—and transmitted to us. It seems in every way amply sufficient to give us full information concerning the whole counsel of God, and we do not now possess any other means of knowing, with anything like precision or accuracy, what Christ and his apostles made known to men or enjoined upon them. (Rev. xxii. 18.)



LECTURE XXXVIII.

TRADITION : ITS ALLEGED NECESSITY PROVED BY INSTANCES.

THE considerations which have hitherto been adduced upon this subject have borne chiefly upon the question of the perfection and sufficiency of the Scriptures as the only rule of faith, and not directly upon the question of the necessity and value of tradition, the great rival which Papists and Tractarians set up to the exclusive authority of the written word. There is another argument of which both these parties make large and liberal use, which is perhaps the most important and plausible they have, and which if valid would tend at once, by one and the same process, both to disprove the sufficiency and perfection of the written word, and to establish the necessity and authority of unwritten tradition. It is in substance this, that there are doctrines which are not taught in the Scriptures, but which are true, many of them admitted even by the opposers of tradition, and which are received as true, and as coming from God, only because tradition has taught them. If this general position could be established, it would go far to effect the great object which Papists and Tractarians have in view. Of course its validity depends wholly upon the production and establishment of the particular instances of the doctrines to which it is alleged to apply ; and hence it is of importance to consider carefully what must be proved in regard to the particular instances of the doctrines by which this general position is alleged to be established. In regard to all the instances of doctrines adduced for this purpose, it must be proved—first, that the particular doctrine belongs to that class of truths of which Protestants allege that

the written word is the exclusive standard and depository, viz., the counsel of God revealed for man's salvation; second, that the doctrine is true, and one which it is obligatory upon men to believe; and third, that it is not made known by Scripture, but is learned only from tradition. All these things must be proved of any particular doctrine which is brought forward as a specimen or instance to prove the general position stated above, which constitutes the argument we are now considering against the perfection of the written word, and in favour of the necessity and authority of oral tradition. One good and undoubted instance answering these conditions would be sufficient to establish the general principle, but no instance will be of any avail in establishing it unless all these conditions can be clearly shewn to attach to it. Now, in regard to all the instances of doctrines usually adduced by Papists and Tractarians in support of this general position, we assert, and undertake to prove, that they fail in answering some one or more of these obviously reasonable and indispensable conditions; in other words, to prove in regard to each of them that it does not belong to that class of truths of which we hold the Bible to be the exclusive standard and depository; *or*, that it is not true, and that we are not under any obligation to believe it; *or*, that it is contained in the Bible, and may be fairly deduced from a careful examination of its statements without the necessity of calling in tradition. By the proof of any one of these positions in regard to any instance alleged, it is manifestly deprived of all force or validity for the purpose for which it is adduced, of all fitness to establish the general principle by which the sufficiency and perfection of Scripture are assailed.

The instances commonly adduced by Papists and Tractarians in support of this general position are of two classes—first, that containing doctrines of which it is alleged that there is no information given us in Scripture; and second, that containing doctrines—and these usually respect matters of greater intrinsic importance—which, though there may be hints or notices of them in Scripture, it is said, could not be fully understood as received and held by the orthodox church, and could not be clearly and conclusively established by Scripture alone, without the help of tradition. The latter class belong partly to what is usually discussed under the head of our present subject, viz., the perfection

of the Scriptures, and partly to that of the perspicuity or clearness of the Scriptures, which we are afterwards to consider ; but most authors have discussed them together at this stage of the argument which we have now reached. The instances adduced in support of this general position of Tractarians are the very same as those usually brought forward by the advocates of Popery ; and indeed the argument itself, as well as the proofs of it, are manifestly borrowed from them. The Tractarians have laboured this point much. Mr Goode has made a very full collection of the doctrines which they have brought forward for the purpose of overthrowing the perfection of Scripture, and establishing the authority of tradition or catholic consent upon the principle of the argument which has just been explained, and I will lay before you his list of them. The more important and fundamental truths in regard to which Papists and Tractarians allege that, though there may be some obscure hint or notice of them in the Scripture, yet that they cannot be fully understood and conclusively established by Scripture alone without the help of tradition, are the pre-existence and incarnation of Christ, the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, and the divinity and procession of the Holy Spirit.

Now, in regard to all these doctrines, we assert and undertake to prove—first, as an *argumentum ad homines*, that the Fathers whose statements constitute the tradition or catholic consent which they call in to support the deficiencies of Scripture upon these points, maintained that these doctrines were sufficiently revealed in and could be fully established from Scripture ; and second, that we can produce from the written word sufficient evidence for all that we believe and regard as binding concerning those subjects, and that in regard to any explanation concerning those mysterious points which may be found in the writings of the orthodox Fathers, we receive them or care about them no farther than they can be shewn to be sanctioned by the statements of Scripture. In alleging, and in endeavouring to establish the unsatisfactory character of scriptural information and evidence in regard to these important doctrines, Papists and Tractarians manifest, in a very striking and melancholy way, the spirit by which they are animated, and the tendency of the doctrines they teach. And indeed some of them in discussing this subject have not

scrupled to bring forward and urge all the common Socinian objections against these great doctrines, and then they go on to insinuate that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to answer these Socinian objections upon scriptural grounds, and without calling in to our aid the authority of tradition. Father Simon, as he is commonly called, a very learned and ingenious Popish writer, who however, it ought to be mentioned, laboured so openly and so anxiously to overturn the authority of the Scripture, professedly that he might establish upon its ruins that of tradition and the church, that he has been regarded by many as an infidel at heart, though he lived and died a Popish priest, says expressly in the preface to the second edition of his *Critical History of the Old Testament*, that "without tradition we cannot answer the Socinians;"¹ and Dr Hook, the present vicar of Leeds, though not usually reckoned quite so Popish as some of the Tractarians, has thought proper to tread in the footsteps of the most unprincipled and worthless class of Papists, and to assert of those who refuse to admit the authority of tradition, *i.e.* of the great body of Protestants, that it is only on account of their being bad logicians that they are not Socinians²—a statement which, as coming from a professed Trinitarian, ought to be regarded with the most decided reprobation, as an act of unprincipled treachery to what he professes to believe to be an important truth, since it just amounts in plain terms to an assertion that in an exact logical argument upon scriptural statements the Socinian is entitled to the victory.

The other class of doctrines adduced by Papists and Tractarians in support of this argument, those, *viz.*, of which it is said that Scripture gives us no information and no proof, and which are known and established only by tradition, is a somewhat large one, and in regard to some of the points included in it, it is to be remarked, of both Papists and Tractarians, that though, when they are labouring to establish by this means the imperfection and insufficiency of Scripture, and the necessity and authority of tradition, they represent them as not revealed in Scripture, yet when this object is not in their view, and when they are discussing these doctrines by themselves, they admit that there are arguments to be found in support of them in the written word. Bellarmine, for instance, when treating *De Verbo Dei*, and endeavouring to shew

¹ Le Clerc, *Sentimens* 27.

² Goode, vol. i. p. 65.

the necessity of tradition, adduces the doctrine of infant baptism as a doctrine not taught in Scripture, and resting only on tradition (tom. i. p. 70), while in discussing the subject of baptism itself, and treating *De Baptismo Infantum contra Anabaptistas* (tom. iii. p. 109), he adduces scriptural evidence amply sufficient to establish it. The instances commonly given under this head respect both matters of belief and matters of practice—the latter being chiefly connected with external rites and observances. The following is Mr Goode's list of the instances adduced by Tractarians of points of faith and practice not revealed and proved by Scripture, but established and rendered obligatory by the authority of tradition alone, and all these points are minutely and fully discussed by Mr Goode, and shewn to be inapplicable to the purpose for which Papists and Tractarians adduce them :—

“The consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, the pre-existence of Christ, that the Father is unbegotten, the divinity of the Holy Spirit, the procession of the Holy Spirit, the incarnation of the Son, the literal non-acceptation of the Lord's words respecting washing one another's feet, the non-observance of the seventh day as a day of religious rest, infant baptism, the sanctification of the first day of the week, the perpetual obligation of the Eucharist, the identity of our mode of consecration in the Eucharist with the apostolical, that consecration by apostolical authority is essential to the participation of the Eucharist, the separation of the clergy from the people as a distinct order, the threefold order of the priesthood, the government of the church by bishops, the apostolical succession, baptismal regeneration, the virtue of the Eucharist as a commemorative sacrifice, an intermediate state, Christ's descent to hell, the validity of the baptism of heretics, the canon of Scripture, that Melchisedec's feast is a type of the Eucharist, that the book of Canticles represents the union between Christ and his church, that Wisdom in the book of Proverbs refers to the second person of the Trinity, and the alleged perpetual virginity of the mother of our Lord.”

These are the contents of the eight chapters of Goode's *Divine Rule of Faith and Practice*, vol. ii. It would be a waste of time and out of place to discuss them here. We may advert to one or two of the principal of them, merely as specimens of the way, or rather of the different ways, in which it may be shewn that they all fail in answering one or more of the conditions formerly laid down as indispensable to their validity, as instances in support of the general position for the establishment of which they are adduced. The most important of them all, in some respects, is the canon of Scripture, and they usually comprehend, also under this

head, the subject of inspiration. The way in which the objection upon this point is put by Papists and Tractarians is this : They say to us, you profess to believe as true doctrines that the Bible is the word of God, and that certain particular books compose it, but you do not find these doctrines in the Bible itself, they are not taught or revealed there. You learn them from tradition, and believe them upon its authority, and here therefore is an instance of an important truth not learned from Scripture, but from tradition, and consequently a proof of the imperfection and insufficiency of the Bible, and of the necessity and authority of tradition. Now, our answer to this objection is this : 1. We can prove the truth of these doctrines about the divine origin and canonical authority of the Bible by satisfactory and conclusive evidence, and can establish them against all gainsayers, whether infidels who openly deny them, or Papists and Tractarians who, without openly denying them, labour to undermine the force of many of the arguments by which they may be and should be established. The truth of this position we have already had occasion fully to illustrate. 2. These doctrines of the inspiration and canonical authority of the books of Scripture do not come under the class of truths of which Protestants contend that the Bible is the exclusive standard and depository, but are from their very nature preliminary or antecedent. The proper state of the question between Protestants and Papists upon this subject of the sufficiency and perfection of Scripture is this : It being admitted on both sides that the Bible is the word of God, and consists of certain books (for on the canon of the New Testament embracing all the subjects on which traditions, alleged to be handed down from Christ and his Apostles, are brought to bear, Protestants and Papists are of one mind), the question is, have we any other source from which we can certainly learn what Christ and his apostles taught, so that information upon this point, derived from that source, shall be as binding upon us as what is derived from the Bible? And when Papists and Tractarians, in place of fairly and candidly discussing this question, go back and raise difficulties about a preliminary point, which *at this stage of the argument* ought to be received and held as settled, they give good ground to suspect that they are more concerned about victory than truth, more anxious to perplex than to convince, and ready to undermine any truth, however important, if they

think they can thereby involve an opponent in a difficulty, or promote any of these objects. There is really however no difficulty whatever in the matter. We are quite ready to discuss with Papists and Tractarians any question whatever; but we wish each question to be kept in its right place, and discussed upon its own proper grounds. We are quite willing to discuss with them the subject of the divine origin and canonical authority of the books of Scripture, and not only to prove the doctrines we hold upon those subjects, but also to prove moreover that, in the process of establishing them by satisfactory evidence, we have not committed ourselves to any Popish or Tractarian principle about tradition or church authority, and that we have not precluded ourselves, in reality or even in appearance, by any position we have laid down in discussing this subject, from maintaining that these books, previously proved to be the word of God, and admitted on both sides to possess this character, are the only rule of faith, and the only source from which we can now derive authentic and infallible information as to what is the will of God revealed for our salvation.

Indeed, the question as to the sufficiency and perfection of the Scripture, and its exclusive authority as the rule of faith, cannot be fairly and intelligibly stated without making it manifest that the question of the divine origin and canonical authority of the books of Scripture is a preliminary point, which at this stage of the argument must be held as established or conceded, and that to attempt to go back upon it here is to violate at once the rules of logic and of fairness. We do not contend that *every proposition we hold concerning religious subjects* is actually asserted or declared in the Bible; what we contend for is this, that *having once ascertained and proved* that the Bible is the word of God, we are bound to believe upon its authority, and as one of the doctrines taught in it, as well as upon grounds derived from other considerations, that it contains the whole will of God revealed for our salvation, and that we are to seek nowhere else for any authentic information as to what he requires us to believe and to do. In reply to this, Papists and Tractarians virtually say to us, We admit that the Bible is the word of God, and that all its statements come from him; but we contend that there is another source, viz., tradition, from which equally authentic information as to matters of faith and practice may be derived;

and if they would honestly follow out this, the true state of the question, they would see that it was irrelevant and unfair to go back now upon the preliminary point of the canonical authority of the Scriptures, and that if they undertake to produce, in disproof of our position about the perfection and sufficiency of the written word, and in support of their own, instances of doctrines not taught in Scripture but learned from tradition, they must in fairness confine themselves to instances analogous *in their general nature and character* to those of which we assert the Bible to be the only rule, the exclusive standard and depository; viz., particular points of faith and practice. This instance then of the divine origin and canonical authority of the Scripture does not answer the first of the conditions which we laid down as indispensable. It does not belong to that class of truths of which we assert the Bible to be the only rule and standard, but is from its very nature preliminary or antecedent.

There is another class of these alleged instances of faith and practice brought forward by Papists and Tractarians to prove the imperfection and insufficiency of the Scripture and the necessity and authority of tradition, in regard to which the ground we take is this: They do not answer the second condition which we laid down, *i.e.* we assert that they are not true, or what is quite sufficient for the purpose of the argument, that they have never been proved to be true by any competent evidence of any kind or from any source, and that therefore we are under no obligation to admit or receive them. In regard to some of them, we assert and undertake to prove from the Scriptures that they are false, that they are opposed to the word of God, and that no tradition however respectable, no Catholic consent however general, is sufficient to establish them, or to impose upon us an obligation to believe them; while in regard to one or two points that may come under this head, we say that we have no sufficient materials for deciding certainly whether they are true or false, and that it is a matter of no consequence whatever whether they are true or not. Baptismal regeneration, a commemorative sacrifice in the Eucharist, in the sense in which that is held by Tractarians, an intermediate state, and prayers for the dead, the threefold order of the priesthood, and the government of the Church by bishops or rather prelates—these doctrines we readily admit are not taught in Scripture. We

concede all this to the Tractarians ; but we further contend, and here we differ from them, that not only are they not taught in Scripture, but that Scripture affords sufficient materials for disproving them, and thereby imposes upon us an obligation to reject them. Of course Protestants, who concur in holding, in opposition to Papists and Tractarians, the perfection of the written word and its exclusive authority as a rule of faith, differ among themselves whether some of the instances adduced should be ranked in this class or in another, viz., that of those in regard to which it is asserted that they *are* taught in Scripture, and that we are not dependent upon tradition either for the knowledge or the proof of them. Mr Goode, as an honest Episcopalian, contends that the threefold order in the ministry, or as Papists and Tractarians call it, the priesthood, and the government of the church by prelates, are sanctioned by Scripture, and are sufficiently established by its statements. Presbyterians may fairly take some advantage of the concession of the Tractarians, that these points are *not* established by scriptural authority, and they are not likely to be much impressed by the attempt which Mr Goode is obliged to make to prove that they are. It is rather a singular spectacle to see Mr Goode, who cherishes the most kindly and Christian feelings towards non-prelatic churches, and who repudiates the idea of refusing to their pastors the title of ministers of Christ, engaged in establishing *against Tractarians* the scriptural authority of prelacy, and at the same time to see Tractarians refusing to acknowledge as ministers of Christ men who were ordained, as Timothy was, by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery, while yet they themselves admit that prelacy cannot be established from Scripture, and is dependent for its authority on tradition. There is nothing thoroughly consistent but truth, full and absolute truth, and truth on the subject of church government is Presbyterianism.

It is certain however that a considerable number of these instances may be conclusively disposed of by asserting and proving that they are not true and obligatory ; that whatever countenance they may have from tradition—and with respect to some of them, a dispute may be raised even upon this point—they are discountenanced and opposed by the written word, and therefore do not fulfil all the conditions necessary to give them validity as proofs of the general position in support of which they are

adduced. In regard to other instances, the ground we take is this, that we have no very certain means of deciding whether they are true or false, and that it is of little or no consequence what opinion men may entertain concerning them. The perpetual virginity of the mother of our Lord, which is one of the instances adduced by Papists and Tractarians, and which they contend for as if it were an important article of faith, is a specimen of this class. Scripture would rather seem to indicate that after our Lord's birth she lived with Joseph as his wife; but as the persons spoken of in Scripture as our Lord's brethren might be his kinsmen or cousins, there is perhaps no conclusive disproof of the Popish and Tractarian view upon this point, and except in so far as there might be materials in Scripture for deciding it, no man of good sense and right feeling would ever have thought of adverting to it; and it is a deplorable exhibition of the general character of the religion that is now so much in vogue, that the Tractarians should have borrowed this topic from the Papists, and followed their example in not only asserting a positive opinion concerning it as an important article of faith, but likewise in employing it, as Bellarmine and other Papists do, as an argument against the sufficiency and perfection of the written word, and in support of the necessity of pressing upon men's attention and acceptance all the follies and absurdities of the fifth century. There is, as has been mentioned, another class of these instances adduced by Papists and Tractarians which we proved to be insufficient to establish the general position and to serve their purpose, by not answering the third of the conditions which are laid down as indispensable. In regard to this third class, we assert and undertake to prove that they *are* taught in Scripture with sufficient clearness and plainness, and that we are not dependent upon tradition for the knowledge and the proof of them. This applies to such points as the non-observance of the seventh, and the sanctification of the first day of the week, the baptism of infants, the perpetual obligation of the Eucharist, as well as the doctrines generally received concerning the Trinity and the person of Christ. In regard to all these points, Papists and Tractarians assert that they cannot be learned and proved from Scripture, or at least not fully and certainly, but only from tradition. We believe these points as well as they; but we differ from them in this, that we

think they can be proved from Scripture, without requiring the assistance of tradition, while we can also shew that, in regard to some of them, the very men on whose tradition our opponents profess to receive them, thought they could be proved from Scripture, and proved them accordingly as we do; and in regard to others of them, that the testimony of tradition in their favour is at least as obscure as the testimony of Scripture is.

In these various ways, all the different instances of alleged points of faith and practice commonly adduced by Papists and Tractarians to prove the insufficiency and imperfection of the written word, and to establish the necessity and authority of unwritten tradition, may be satisfactorily disposed of. Not one of them can be of any real avail in supporting their views, or in disproving ours, unless all these positions can be established regarding it—first, that it belongs to the class of truths fairly contemplated in the proper state of the question under discussion; second, that it is true in itself, and that it is in some way obligatory upon us to believe it; and third, that it is not taught in and cannot be proved from Scripture without the help of tradition; and there is not one of them of which all these three positions can be established. With respect to the divine origin and canonical authority of the books of Scripture, it is admitted that this is a great and fundamental truth, and also that it cannot be established merely from any particular statements actually contained in the Bible, but then it does not belong to that class of truths fairly contemplated in the right statement of the question in dispute; and all the rest may be ranked under one or other of two classes—either they are not true, or what is the same thing, so far as the argument is concerned, we are not under any obligation to admit and receive them, or they *are* contained in Scripture, and may be ascertained and established from an examination of its statements.

This topic furnishes perhaps the most plausible argument which has yet been devised by the haters of God's word against its sufficiency and perfection as the only rule of faith and practice, and in support of the necessity and authority of unwritten tradition; and yet you see how easily it is answered, and how entirely destitute it is of all real strength and solidity.

LECTURE XXXIX.

TRADITION : POSITIVE EVIDENCE AGAINST IT.

WE have shewn you that the sacred Scripture plainly enough assures us of its own sufficiency and perfection, that is, it assures us that it contains everything which God requires of us to believe and to do in order to our salvation; and that of course we need not seek anywhere else for his revealed will, and are under no obligation to receive as coming from him, and binding upon our consciences by his authority, anything which is not deduced from and sanctioned by his written word. We have shewn you also, that there is nothing whatever in Scripture which tends to throw the slightest doubt upon the truth of this doctrine, or to require any modification of it, and more especially nothing which gives any countenance to the idea that the will of God was to be learned from traditions of what was orally taught by Christ and his apostles. We have also proved the utter futility of the attempt made by Papists and Tractarians to disprove the sufficiency and perfection of the written word by an appeal to matters of fact, *i.e.* by producing instances of doctrines which are generally received as coming from God, but which are alleged to be learned and proved not from Scripture but tradition, by shewing you that the doctrines adduced as instances either are not true and obligatory, or else are contained in and sanctioned by Scripture. This is quite sufficient to establish the great Protestant doctrine of our Confession, and we have already explained it in opposition to Papists and Tractarians, *viz.*, that "the whole counsel of God concerning his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture." The Confession adds, "Unto which nothing is at any

time to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or by traditions of men." We have warnings given us in Scripture against new revelations coming from any but the apostles and their associates, even though they should seem to be very plausibly supported. We have plain intimations that no further public general revelation of God's will is to be made to the church during the dispensation in which our lot has been cast. It is not necessary to dwell upon the proof of this. We would merely remark that the church has been frequently disturbed by pretensions to new revelations of the Spirit, from Montanism in the second century down to those claims to miraculous gifts which have been put forth in our own age and country, and that these pretensions, after deluding a few respectable persons of peculiar mental constitution and temperament, and a considerable number of others who had no claims to respect, have died away and been forgotten, while the word of the Lord endureth for ever. The traditions of men, however, have proved a much more formidable and permanent rival to the written word than pretended new revelations of the Spirit. They early began to exert an injurious influence upon the church. They have been adopted by the Church of Rome, which is pledged by the decree of the Council of Trent to receive and venerate them with equal piety and reverence as the sacred Scripture, and which has employed them among the principal means of diffusing her doctrines and accomplishing her purposes; and they are made the sole foundation on which the Tractarian system rests.

The traditions which the Church of Rome receives and venerates with equal piety and reverence as the sacred Scriptures, are described in the decree of the Council of Trent as points both of faith and practice, which were orally delivered by Christ to the apostles, or which were orally delivered by the apostles under the guidance of the Spirit, and which, though not recorded in Scripture, have been preserved by continual succession in the Catholic Church, or as it is commonly expressed, have been handed down by oral tradition. Now, this doctrine implies that it is only points which really were spoken by Christ, or were delivered by the apostles, as matter of public instruction to the churches, and which are in some competent way proved to possess this character, to have originated in this source, that we are under any obligation to receive as divine and apostolical traditions. The evidence usually offered of the

claim of particular doctrines, either as to matters of belief or practice, to be received as divine and apostolical traditions, is, that though not recorded in Scripture, they were generally believed by the early church and are contained in the writings of the Fathers; and the more moderate defenders of Popery have admitted that it is only when this allegation of general reception by the early church can be proved by the writings of the Fathers that the particular traditions are obligatory. Some Papists however, feeling the difficulty of defending many of their alleged traditionary doctrines by an appeal to the early church and the consent of the Fathers, have claimed a larger scope for the authority of the church in this matter, and have gone the length of almost openly claiming for the church, *i.e.* the present or existing church, an absolute right of declaring authoritatively at any time what are the oral traditions which have come down from Christ and his apostles, without being under the necessity of making out the chain of connection by proving their general reception in the church from early times; and it has certainly been in the exercise of such an arbitrary and unlimited authority that the actual standard of Popish faith and practice has been formed, for it contains many articles of which it can be proved not only that no evidence exists that they were generally received by the early church, but that they were opposed to the views which then generally prevailed.

The Church of Rome indeed has not explicitly tied herself down, in declaring and imposing apostolical traditions, to the consent of the Fathers, as she has done in regard to the interpretation of Scripture. But still most of her defenders, in discussing the principles of this subject, have admitted that, in proposing and imposing anything as an apostolical tradition, she is called upon to produce some evidence that it was generally received in the early church, and is therefore, as they agree, to be regarded as having proceeded from the apostles. Unwritten traditions, then, on this view, though not recorded in Scripture, are said to be found in the writings of the Fathers, and to be thus proved to have come down from apostolical times. Bellarmine expressly concedes this. He says: "*Vocatur autem doctrina non scripta, non ea quæ nusquam scripta est, sed quæ non est scripta a primo auctore, exemplo est baptismus parvulorum. Parvulos baptizandos esse vocatur traditio apostolica non scripta, quia non invenitur hoc*

scriptum in ullo apostolico libro, tametsi scriptum est in libris fere omnium veterum Patrum.”¹

The doctrine of the Tractarians upon the subject of tradition is precisely that of the Papists—that is, they agree with them in all their general principles as to the nature, authority, and validity of tradition as a divine informant, to use a favourite Tractarian phrase, or as an authorised and certain mode or channel of conveying to us the divine will; and they differ with them only as to the matter of fact, viz., whether all the traditions which are held and imposed by the Church of Rome are accompanied with sufficient evidence that they did come from the apostles, and are therefore to be received as a part of the divine rule of faith. This is expressly admitted in the *Tracts for the Times*, in one written by Dr Pusey, in a passage which is perhaps worth quoting, because of its boldness and plain speaking. He says: “The controversy with Rome is not on an *a priori* question on the value of tradition in itself, or at an earlier period of the church, or of such traditions as though not contained in Scripture, are primitive, universal, and apostolical, *but it is one purely historical*; that the Romanist traditions not being such, but on the contrary repugnant to Scripture, are not to be received.”² That is, they entirely agree with the Papists in their whole general doctrine upon this subject, and differ merely in some of the details of its application. We have seen that they receive many things not contained in Scripture as binding by divine authority upon the alleged ground of tradition, and these are all points which are held by the Church of Rome, and rejected by almost all Protestants. But they think that, as a matter of history, there were some of the Popish traditions which were not sufficiently proved to have proceeded from the apostles, and some which were opposed to Scripture, and were therefore to be rejected. The doctrine of the word of God and of our Confession is, that nothing is at any time to be added to the written word by traditions, which the Confession calls “traditions of men,” because there are none which can be shewn to possess any higher than human origin. The doctrine of the Church of Rome and the Tractarians upon the subject is directly the reverse of this, viz., that there are additions infallibly true and imperatively binding made to the written word by unwritten tradition.

¹ *De Verbo Dei*, lib. iv. chap. ii. p. 66.

² Goode, vol. i. p. 38.

The doctrine of the Papists and Tractarians upon this subject may be regarded as involving these three propositions—first, that tradition is a divinely authorised channel or provision for conveying to us the will of God, as well as the written word; second, that tradition is fitted to convey to us the oral teaching of the apostles purely and certainly, as purely and certainly as if it had been embodied by themselves in a written record; and third, that in point of fact, we have traditions of matters of faith and practice which are not recorded in Scripture, but which yet can be traced, by satisfactory evidence, to the oral teaching of the apostles. The first and third of these propositions have already been refuted when we were establishing directly the sufficiency and perfection of the written word, and answering the objections which have been adduced against it; and the second, as to the fitness of tradition to convey purely and certainly the oral teaching of the apostles is so flatly contradictory to common sense, to universal experience, and the whole history of the world and the church, that it is scarcely deserving of an answer. We shall not now, therefore, attempt any regular discussion of this subject, but only make a few additional miscellaneous observations regarding it. An attempt has been made to shew that the Scripture authorises tradition, and virtually refers us to that source as a means of certainly knowing the divine will, an attempt based upon these passages in which the Apostle Paul requires the churches to adhere to the traditions which they had received from him. The irrelevancy of these passages to the purpose for which they are adduced, and the futility of the argument founded upon them, have been already sufficiently exposed. But not only does Scripture give no countenance or authority to tradition as a recognised means of conveying to us the divine will, and not only does it virtually exclude tradition as a divine informant by plainly enough asserting its own sufficiency and perfection, but it also contains much that goes directly to disprove the authority and validity of tradition. The pharisaic doctrine of tradition was the same as that of the Papists and Tractarians, and the use made of it by the Pharisees was precisely analogous to that made of it by their successors in the work of corrupting true religion, so that tradition is an old device of Satan; it met, as exhibited in the case of the Pharisees, with the most decided and emphatic condemnation from our

Saviour, who not only himself refused to pay the smallest regard or respect to their traditions ; in this as in everything else leaving us an example that we should follow his steps, but declared that they made the word of God of none effect by their traditions—a declaration just as applicable to the conduct of Papists and Tractarians as to that of those against whom it was originally directed. When our Lord had so emphatically denounced this principle, and the use made of it, it might have been expected that Satan would scarcely have ventured to have again employed the same device for making the word of God of none effect among men who professed to honour Christ, and to submit to his authority. But the event has justified his wisdom and his knowledge of human nature. He has again succeeded, notwithstanding our Saviour's warnings and denunciations, in making the word of God of none effect by tradition, in grievously corrupting the true religion by means of the devices and inventions of men. We cannot recognise tradition as an authorised method of conveying to us the divine will, unless we have God's own authority for regarding and trusting it as such. But God in his word has not only given it no such authority, but has, both by general principles and by specific statements, forbidden us to take it as our rule or guide.

The alleged fitness of tradition to convey to us purely and certainly the oral teaching of the apostles, depends upon such positions as these—first, that the church of the apostolic age would purely and accurately convey to the church of the next generation many things which the apostles had orally taught, and that generation to the next, and so on ; second, that we have such records and evidences of what was generally held and received by the church in each succeeding generation as to be provided with sufficient materials for ascertaining in this way what had been handed down from the apostles ; third, that no changes of doctrine or practice could have been introduced into the church in any age subsequent to the apostolic without attracting attention, giving rise to discussion, and thus becoming historically known to us as changes or novelties. Such notions are plainly inconsistent with universal experience, with the history of opinion in almost every country, and in regard to all subjects, and are flatly contradicted by palpable and notorious facts in the history of the Christian church. And yet some of the bolder defenders of Popery do

not scruple to maintain, and the mass of Papists believe, that all the present tenets of the Church of Rome in regard to matters of faith and practice have been handed down in uninterrupted succession from the oral teaching of the apostles ; and they generally insist that, whenever we allege that any of the tenets and practices of the Church of Rome are not warrantable and obligatory, we shall produce positive historical evidence as to when and where and how they originated. We deny our obligation to undertake any such burden of proof. We are warned in Scripture not only that heresies would spring up in the church, but that they would be brought in privily. Our Saviour has recognised it as a legitimate argument, "that from the beginning it was not so." The Apostle Paul sometimes founds an argument, as, for example, in more than one instance in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, upon the mere silence of Scripture ; and therefore we regard it as quite sufficient ground for rejecting any of the tenets or practices of Popery to shew that they are not sanctioned or authorised by the written word. But Protestant writers have in many instances given an authentic history of the rise, growth, and progress of Popish errors and corruptions, and in a still greater number of instances have produced conclusive proof from the writings of the Fathers, that at a certain era in the history of the church those tenets were not generally held and received, and have thus completely cut off all connection between them and the oral teaching of the apostles. The history of the church abundantly proves, that immediately after the apostolic age, a variety of new tenets and practices sprang up in different parts of the church ; that these errors and corruptions increased and extended both in number and degree, until in the beginning of the fifth century they attained the form and aspect in which they are now pressed upon us by Tractarians as the full and genuine model of the apostolic church, and in another century or two became mature and full-blown Popery. We have few written records to enable us to know with anything like fulness and certainty what were the views and practices which prevailed in the church at large in the age immediately succeeding that of the apostles ; but we have enough to afford us materials for proving that many things held by the Fathers of the fifth century were not then known and believed, and there are many things embodied

in the history of the preceding period which demonstrate the folly of regarding the general maintenance of a notion, or the general adoption of a practice, in the third or fourth century, as of itself a proof that it proceeded from the apostles, and was handed down purely and accurately from generation to generation.

There is one instance of this which seems to have been providentially arranged, and intended by God for the express purpose of holding out to all succeeding generations a palpable and conclusive proof of the folly of placing any reliance upon alleged tradition, as a certain and authentic mode of conveying the mind and teaching of the apostles; and though it is very well known, it may not be improper to advert to it. I allude to the keen contention which arose near the end of the second century between the Eastern and the Western Churches as to the day on which Easter was to be kept, both parties claiming for their opposite practices the authority and example of apostles. The question was this, whether Easter, *i.e.* the anniversary commemoration of the day of our Lord's resurrection, should be kept on the same day of the month or on the same day of the week on which the event itself took place; in other words, whether it should be kept upon the fourteenth day of the month, whatever day of the week that might be, or on the first day of the week, whatever day of the month that might be. The Eastern Churches observed it upon the fourteenth day of the month, and pleaded for this practice the authority and example of the Apostle John. The Church of Rome and the Western Churches observed it upon the first day of the week, and pleaded for this the authority and practice of the Apostles Peter and Paul, whose names the Popes have so often in their Bulls prostituted, and continue to this day to prostitute, to the most nefarious purposes. Both parties adhered to their respective practices based upon such respectable authority, and the matter terminated for the time by the Bishop of Rome excommunicating all the Eastern Churches as guilty, notwithstanding the authority of the Apostle John, of holding what was called the Quartodeciman heresy, or the heresy of keeping Easter on the fourteenth day of the month, the truth all the while being, as we are firmly persuaded, that John and Peter and Paul did not keep Easter on *any* day, any more than we do. In Acts xii. 4, Easter means the Jewish Passover. All this

took place before the end of the second century, and the important fact remains a standing memorial, and an impressive warning to the church, to place no implicit reliance upon any alleged apostolic traditions except those which the apostles themselves have committed to written record. The Tractarians have selected the latter part of the fourth and the early part of the fifth century, a period of about one hundred years after the Council of Nice, as that in which the church exhibited most fully in doctrine and practice the whole of what had come down by tradition from the apostles. The church of that period, they hold that the church of every subsequent age is bound to copy. How far the church of that period is in fact from being worthy of imitation, if the Bible be indeed the word of God, has been most conclusively and impressively shewn in Mr Taylor's very valuable work, entitled *Ancient Christianity*. But at present we have to do only with those general principles on which our alleged obligation to take it as our model in all things is founded. They maintain that the doctrines generally held, and the practices generally adopted, by the church of that period, had come down from the apostles, and were derived from their oral teaching; that they had existed in the church during the whole intervening period, but that, from the comparative fewness of the writers of preceding periods, and the particular character and objects of those of their writings which have come down to us, we have not till we come down to the beginning of the fifth century sufficient materials for ascertaining fully what the apostles taught the churches, and what had been handed down from them in the church by oral tradition.

This great general principle has a plausible sound. It is usually put forth in some such form as this, that what has always been held by the whole church, from the apostles' times downwards, must have come from the apostles themselves; or what is commonly indicated by the well-known words, "quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus." Now, independently of the objections that might be conclusively urged against this as a general position from the actual history of the church, when it is adduced as the basis of anything more than a probability, it has been alleged and proved that there is no one matter of faith or practice not sanctioned by Scripture to which the general rule, even after making considerable deductions from its universality, does in point

of fact apply. And accordingly we find that both Papists and Tractarians, while they talk much about consentient patristical tradition and Catholic consent, and the faith of the universal church, frequently attempt to put us off with a very meagre and scanty measure of evidence, even from the Fathers, for the traditions which they require us to receive as apostolical, the Fathers often contradicting themselves and differing from each other, and affording very insufficient and unsatisfactory intimations of what was believed and practised in the church at large. Indeed, almost the only tradition to which the rule "quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus" really applies, the only point connected with or involved in these controversies on which the Fathers were unanimous, or nearly so, was just the sufficiency and perfection of the written word as the only divine rule of faith, and the right and duty of all men to read and study it for their own guidance. The Fathers do indeed sometimes refer to oral traditions for certain purposes, but never to the exclusion or disparagement of the written word. And it has been proved conclusively that most of the passages in which the Fathers speak of tradition, the evangelical tradition as they often call it, and which are commonly adduced by Papists and Tractarians as testimony in favour of unwritten tradition, do really in the intention of the Fathers apply to the written word. All this has been often established by the leading writers in opposition to the Church of Rome, and it has been fully established by Mr Goode in opposition to the Tractarians.¹ When Papists and Tractarians are thus met upon their own grounds and discomfited by an appeal to the Fathers, they commonly have recourse for shelter and defence in their extremity to what is called *disciplina arcani*, or an alleged practice of the Fathers to conceal their real views. If this practice did generally obtain among them, it would certainly very materially affect the practicability of ascertaining from them what had been handed down from apostolic times on particular points of faith and practice; and moreover, it would certainly not account for the explicit declarations many of them have given in opposition to Papist and Tractarian views upon the subject of the rule of faith.

The principal answer which the Tractarians have given to Mr

Goode's conclusive proof that the Fathers generally did not hold their views in regard to the rule of faith, but asserted the sufficiency and perfection of the written word in opposition to unwritten tradition, is just this, that he did not take into account the *disciplina arcani*, or their practice of concealing their real opinions. The use made of the *disciplina arcani* by Tractarians in discussing the testimonies of the Fathers is precisely the same as that made of it by the Papists, and indeed is manifestly borrowed from them. It is thus ridiculed by an old English writer¹ :—

“If you inquire why we read nothing of transubstantiation in ancient authors, the answer is very easy and ready. *Disciplina arcani*. Why the Fathers did not assert the worship of images. *Disciplina arcani*. Why the doctrine of the Trinity was not clearly taught before the Council of Nice. *Disciplina arcani*. Why we have no accounts of the seven sacraments before the seventh century. *Disciplina arcani*. Why the writings of St Denys (*Dionysius*, the areopagite) lay so long concealed. *Disciplina arcani*. And so for every novelty else *disciplina arcani* still returns upon you; and it is so great a charm that some would be almost afraid of it, for it has a strange faculty of making anything look aged that it can but come near. This *disciplina arcani* is an occult quality to solve all difficulties by; and say what you will, those two emphatical words shall bear down all before them.”

There is not any one point of faith or practice not sanctioned and authorised by Scripture in regard to which Papists or Tractarians have ever been able to produce anything like sufficient or satisfactory evidence that it really proceeded from the apostles, and has been accurately handed down by oral tradition, and this consideration of itself, were there no other, is quite sufficient to prove the doctrine of the Confession, that nothing is to be added to the written word by traditions of men, that there is no other source from which we can certainly learn anything which was delivered by Christ and his apostles as matter of public instruction to the churches, and which therefore we are under an obligation to believe and to practise. [Dallæus, *De usu Patrum*.²]

¹ Peek's *Rule of Faith*, pp. 232, 233, giving extract from Comber's *Roman Forgeries in Councils*.

² Newman on *Development* was published since this was written.

LECTURE XL.

LIMITATIONS OF THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE STATED IN CONFESSION—PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE.

THERE are two additions made in the sixth section of the first chapter of the Confession to the assertion of the sufficiency and perfection of the written word as the only rule of faith, to which it is proper briefly to advert. They are thus expressed: "Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word, and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed." These two portions are now evidently introduced in such a way as implies that they are of some importance for guarding against misconstruction, and pointing out in what sense the great truth about the perfection of the written word is to be understood. First, The assertion of the perfection of the written word is not to be understood as implying any doubt or denial of the necessity of the inward illumination of the Spirit of God for savingly understanding what is revealed in the word. The necessity of the illumination of the Spirit for understanding the word is a great scriptural truth of vital and fundamental importance, and never to be forgotten or overlooked in any inquiry as to how we are to know the mind and will of God. We shall have occasion to consider it more fully under the head of the interpretation of Scripture, and in the meantime will make a remark or two upon the second point here introduced, though it is of vastly inferior importance, as we will not have any other occasion to

advert to it. Although the Scripture is the only rule of faith, yet it is also true, as the Confession says, that "there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed." Presbyterians have always held that in the principle that the Bible is the only rule of faith, there is involved this position, that nothing ought to be introduced into the worship and government of the Christian Church, except what is sanctioned by the word of God. Papists and prelatists, and most Lutherans, have contended that the church hath authority to decree rites and ceremonies, a principle which Presbyterians have always decidedly rejected. In establishing this principle, its supporters have made great use of the precept of the apostle, "Let all things be done decently, and in order." They have made it a warrant, though it is a very inadequate one, for introducing many inventions of men into the worship of God and the government of the church, as if necessary for accomplishing these objects. Presbyterians regard it as warranting the principle just quoted from the Confession, but nothing more, viz., that some circumstances connected with the worship and government of the church, which are of a kind common to human actions and societies, and which it is necessary to regulate in order to promote decency, good order, and general comfort and convenience, may be regulated and arranged by the church according to the light of nature and Christian prudence. This is obviously necessary and reasonable, and is sanctioned by the word of God itself.

But there is a fundamental difference between this reasonable and necessary principle of regulating, so far as may be necessary for securing decency and order, some circumstances in the mode of doing those things which God has authorised and required to be done, and the arbitrary introduction into the worship and government of the church of new and distinct things unsanctioned by Scripture, because men in their wisdom imagine, or profess to imagine, that they are fitted to promote decency and good order. The circumstances referred to in the Confession, judging from the principles that have been usually held by Presbyterians upon this subject, are such as these provisions and arrangements concerning

the external conveniences for and the necessary accompaniments of the worship of God and the government of the church ; the time, place, and manner of meeting for the administration of the public worship of God ; the most convenient way of administering public ordinances so as to promote general comfort and decency, without pretending to introduce new things professedly for the purpose of making them more solemn and impressive, or presuming to omit anything which God's word sanctions or enjoins. For instance, the word of God gives a clear sanction to our praying ordinarily, both in a kneeling and in a standing posture. As both these are sanctioned by Scripture, and as it is desirable that there should be uniformity in the matter, the church is warranted to decide whether it is, upon the whole, better that congregations should pray standing or kneeling. But as the example of our Saviour plainly indicates that the Lord's Supper should be received in the ordinary posture commonly used at meals, the church has no right to require that it shall be received kneeling, upon the ground of manifesting thereby greater reverence. Singing of psalms is authorised in Scripture as a part of the public worship of God, and therefore some circumstances connected with the singing of psalms which it may be necessary, from a regard to decency and order, to regulate, may be regulated by the church ; but this affords no warrant for introducing an entirely distinct or different thing, in order, it is said, to heighten the devotion by instrumental music. It may be contended, indeed, that the introduction of instrumental music is merely a regulation of the mode of performing the unquestionable duty of singing psalms. This seems to be rather a lax use of words ; and besides, experience seems to shew that the introduction of this invention of man, in place of aiding or assisting, has a powerful tendency to exclude or to put an end to the practice of singing psalms by the congregation, which God has unquestionably sanctioned and required. These things are mentioned merely as natural and obvious illustrations of that part of the Confession which has come under our notice, and while they tend to explain the general principle there laid down, they also shew that Presbyterians, while repudiating the principle which has been so much abused by Papists, and even by prelatists, of the authority of the church to decree rites and ceremonies, do not run into the opposite extreme, as some

have done, of throwing aside all regard to the light of nature and Christian prudence in regulating some circumstances concerning the worship of God and the government of the church, which are common to human actions and societies, and which a regard to decency and order, to general comfort and convenience, may require to be regulated. The principles of Presbyterians upon this subject have been much misunderstood and misrepresented, and have been assailed from two opposite sides. The defenders of rites and ceremonies, and of the church's authority to decree them, have endeavoured to pour contempt upon the principles of Presbyterians in this matter, by representing them as seeking an express warrant in the word for every *circumstance* connected in any way with the government and worship of the church, and allowing nothing whatever to be regulated by the light of nature and Christian prudence. The second book of Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity* is entirely directed against this erroneous and exaggerated view of the Presbyterian principle; and though Thomas Cartwright, against whom chiefly the *Ecclesiastical Polity* was written, and who is there usually designated as "T. C.," may have laid himself open to Hooker's attack by some rash and unqualified statements upon this point, yet I am persuaded that, upon the whole, Hooker did not represent with perfect fairness the sentiments of his opponents upon this subject; and at any rate it is manifest that the great general principle, with the limitation and modification contained in the clause of the Confession we are at present considering, and introduced no doubt for this very purpose, escapes entirely from the range of Hooker's argument.

On the other hand, some of the stricter Congregationalists in former times, professing to keep much more purely and strictly to the standard of the word than any other party, have alleged that Presbyterians, by this limitation or modification of the general principle, have conceded all that the inventers and defenders of rites and ordinances require, and that they hold as unsound and dangerous views upon this subject as the prelatists. This is not the occasion for entering into anything like a discussion upon this point. But even the few hints that have been thrown out may tend somewhat to convince you of what I am persuaded can be fully established, that Presbyterians occupy upon this subject the golden scriptural mean between two unwarranted and indefensible extremes.

The next section in this first chapter of the Confession introduces another topic which also forms part of the great general subject of the rule of faith, and is usually discussed by divines under the head of the perspicuity of the sacred Scriptures. It is thus expressed:—

“All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear to all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other that not only the learned but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.”

This is a principle of great practical importance, but it will not occupy us long, because, especially after what has already been laid before you, little now requires to be said either in proof or in illustration of it. Protestants maintain the doctrine of the perspicuity, Papists and Tractarians that of the obscurity of Scripture. The object of Papists in denying the perspicuity of the Scriptures, even in necessary things, and in asserting their obscurity, is to furnish reasons for keeping them out of men's hands, and to establish the necessity of tradition and of a living infallible interpreter to explain their meaning authoritatively. The object of the Tractarians is the same, though not quite so explicitly avowed or so strongly stated. Both of them bring forward tradition as fitted not only to supply the deficiencies of Scripture in not making known to us many things which it is incumbent upon us to believe and to do, but also as necessary for enabling us to understand many things which are said in Scripture, but said only obscurely. And though the Tractarians have not yet asserted the infallibility of the church, they have said much fitted and intended to insinuate the difficulty, if not impossibility, of men by their own efforts understanding the Scriptures, and the propriety of their submitting wholly to the guidance of their ecclesiastical superiors in this matter, while they have proclaimed the church to be not only the witness and the keeper, but also the interpreter of Scripture. It is a favourite maxim of theirs that “tradition teaches and Scripture proves,” by which they mean to convey the idea that even the great doctrines of Christianity are so obscurely taught in Scripture that it is not fitted to instruct men in the knowledge of them, though after they have been made known by the clearer and purer light of tradition much may be extracted from Scripture that tends to establish and confirm their truth. What Protestants hold in opposition to

these views of Papists and Tractarians is very clearly, carefully, and precisely stated in the section quoted from our Confession, and it states just what we do not hold, and then what we do. We do not hold that "All things in Scripture are alike plain in themselves, or alike clear to all," *i.e.* we do not deny that there is some obscurity in Scripture, and we do not deny that some persons may find a great deal of obscurity there; and this explanation is necessary, because Papists usually misrepresent our principles upon this subject, and talk as if we denied that there was anything obscure in Scripture to any one. Bellarmine gives this as the state of the question, "*Sintne Scripturæ sacræ per se facillimæ atque apertissimæ an vero interpretatione indigeant*" (p. 52). This is a great deal too vague and indefinite. We admit that there is obscurity in Scripture, and that there are many men to whom it is very obscure. There are many of the subjects brought before us in Scripture to which from their very nature much obscurity attaches, *i.e.* which we are unable fully to comprehend. But we must carefully distinguish between obscurity which is inherent in the subject itself revealed, and obscurity attaching to the revelation of it. Obscurity attaches to such subjects as the fall of mankind, and the sovereignty of God in connection with the responsibility of man, the trinity, the atonement, &c.—an obscurity which will never be fully cleared away, at least so long as we are in this mortal state, and possess only our present capacities.

But it is still very possible, and it is indeed actually the case, and can be proved to be so, that these doctrines are stated or declared in Scripture, clearly and without obscurity, so that from Scripture we can ascertain with clearness and certainty what God requires us to believe concerning them, what doctrines or propositions, because revealed to us, we are bound to receive regarding these matters. This is a distinction which is sound and reasonable in itself, and which is sanctioned by Scripture. One principal proof of the obscurity of Scripture commonly adduced by the Papists is the statement of the Apostle Peter about the Epistles of Paul (2 Pet. iii. 16). "As also, in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to be understood." The relative *which* here, being in the neuter and not in the feminine gender, must refer not to the epistles, but to the things which Paul

speaks of in them. It is in these things or subjects then that Peter says there are some things hard to be understood, no doubt as they are stated in Paul's epistles. But still, as the difficulty of their being understood is predicated directly and immediately of *things* and not of the *epistles*, there is here a recognition of the distinction to which we have referred. There are some things brought before us in Scripture which are not very clearly or freely unfolded, in other words, to which so much obscurity attaches that differences of opinion might not unreasonably be expected concerning them, and that men, while upon the whole convinced that they have attained to the true meaning of the Scripture regarding them, may not always hold this conviction with a great deal of confidence, and may willingly admit that there are materials for plausible arguments on the other side. There are passages of Scripture so obscure that men after carefully examining them may entertain great doubt as to what their meaning is, and may continue uncertain as to which of several different interpretations that have been suggested is the true one. All this is true, and should not be overlooked or forgotten, as it is plainly fitted to impress upon us the conviction that God intended that we should continually and perseveringly study his word, and may reasonably expect in the use of right means to be ever growing in the knowledge of it. But we contend that these parts of Scripture which are in the sense now explained obscure do not respect matters which are necessary to salvation, points either of faith or practice, ignorance or mistake about which will certainly exclude men from the kingdom of heaven. While we thus admit that "all things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves," we further admit, as the Confession says, that they are not alike clear unto all, and that even independently of the great fundamental distinction based upon the possession or the want of "the inward illumination of the Spirit of God," there are differences in men's natural and acquired capacities, in the attention they give to the study of the Scriptures, and the state of mind and feeling in which they conduct it, which very materially affect the actual knowledge they acquire of their meaning, or what is virtually the same thing, the perspicuity or obscurity of the Scriptures *to them*, and the benefit they derive from them. Unlearned, or rather indocile and unstable persons, as the Apostle Peter tells us, wrested some things in

Paul's epistles, as also in other Scriptures, to their own destruction, and persons of this description might of course wrest or pervert anything though it had no real obscurity about it.

All this we admit in explanation of the position which we maintain in regard to the clearness or perspicuity. We do not deny that in these senses and in these respects some obscurity does attach to it. But we contend that all things necessary for salvation are clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other. You will observe that what is here described as "all things necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation," is not the same as what was described in the former section, as "all things necessary for God's glory, and man's salvation, faith, and life." The last statement from the preceding section includes, as we formerly shewed you, everything which men are under obligation to believe and to do upon the ground that God has revealed it, even though not necessary for man's salvation, in this sense, that ignorance of it or error about it would exclude them from heaven. Everything which God has revealed, and by revealing, has put men under an obligation to believe and to do, is, as we have shewn you, contained in the Scripture; and there is an obvious sense in which it is necessary for men to believe everything that is declared, and to do everything which is required in Scripture, inasmuch as culpable ignorance or deliberate neglect of it is sinful.

Everything contained in Scripture has a meaning, and was intended to convey to us some information or instruction. It is our imperative duty to ascertain as far as possible the meaning of the whole written word of God, and to apply it for forming our opinions and regulating our conduct. We do not, however, assert that everything which is thus contained in Scripture, and which it is our duty, as far as we can ascertain its meaning, to receive and apply, is clearly revealed or free from any material obscurity. We assert this only of those things which are necessary to salvation, meaning thereby such things as that ignorance of or error concerning them certainly excludes men from the kingdom of heaven. That there are things contained in Scripture which it is necessary for man's salvation to know, believe, and practise, and that there are things in Scripture ignorance of or error about which does not in point of fact exclude men from heaven, are doctrines which as general propositions scarcely any man who

professes to believe in the divine origin of the Bible would dispute. It is just in other words to assert that there are some things of primary importance contained in Scripture, about which all men who are admitted to heaven have been of one mind, and have followed the same course, and that there are other points of inferior importance brought before us in Scripture, about which those who are at length admitted to heaven have while on earth entertained different opinions, and in regard to which they have followed different practices. But though these general propositions are clearly sanctioned by the Confession, and should be almost universally admitted, yet the subject is attended with some considerable difficulty, especially when any attempt is made to point out the line of demarcation between these two classes of subjects, commonly known under the name of fundamentals and non-fundamentals; and Papists have laboured to improve the difficulty to the utmost for the purpose of involving in doubt or uncertainty the great Protestant doctrine of the perspicuity of the Scriptures in fundamental or necessary things. They often talk as if they wished to deny and overthrow altogether the distinction between fundamentals and non-fundamentals, by urging the equivocal or ambiguous position that it is necessary to believe whatever God has revealed. The different senses in which this position may be taken have been already explained; and that the difference in question actually exists and is realised can be fully established, not only from experience viewed in connection with Scripture, plainly teaching that many men who have differed from each other in their views of some points of scriptural faith and practice, have yet unquestionably exhibited in their character and conduct those things which we know accompany salvation, and therefore we cannot doubt have been admitted to heaven; but likewise from these passages of Scripture which imply that men may differ from each other on some points of belief and practice, and yet may and should cultivate mutual forbearance, and love one another as brethren. But even conceding this, for Papists cannot follow out fully their denial of the distinction, the Papists allege with some plausibility that since we lay down the position that all things necessary for salvation are clearly revealed in Scripture, we must first of all produce a list of the things which are necessary to salvation, else we are arguing in the dark, and do

not even know what is the meaning of the subject of the proposition under discussion. Now in conceding the demand of the Papists, Protestants admit that they are not able to produce an exact and authentic list of those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, although they think that for all necessary practical purposes a knowledge of what are fundamental points may be attained. The Bible itself gives us statements which either expressly assert or plainly imply that certain particular points specified are fundamental, and that ignorance or disbelief of them excludes from the kingdom of heaven. Further, we can trace a pretty complete uniformity in matters both of belief and practice among the great body of those who in every age and country have given the clearest and most unequivocal scriptural marks of enjoying God's favour, of being the subjects of the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, and of walking in the way that leadeth to life.¹ And besides all this, we are able to form a pretty exact estimate as to whether certain doctrines are fundamental or not from an examination of their nature and tendency, their relation to the great ends to which the whole revelation is manifestly directed, and to the leading principles on which it is evidently based. This general idea has been embodied in a distinction to which I formerly alluded, and which is a very interesting and beautiful one. Fundamental points, it has been said, are those which have been revealed to us because it was necessary that they should be known and believed. Non-fundamentals are those which it is necessary to believe just because they have been revealed to us. From the great leading principles on which the scheme of redemption is based, and the main objects to which the Christian revelation is directed, it is plain that there are some truths ignorance or unbelief of which would imply a rejection of these principles and a frustration of these objects, and that therefore without the knowledge and belief of these men could not be regarded as coming within the range of the scheme, or as conformed to or concurring in the object it was designed to accomplish. These have been revealed to us because, from the nature of the case and the character of the objects contemplated, it was necessary, there was an antecedent and intrinsic necessity, that they should be known and believed.

¹ Milner's *History*.

But there are many things in Scripture to which this statement does not apply. We can perceive no such antecedent and inherent necessity, no such intrinsic fitness about them. They might, for aught we can see, have been omitted, without the leading objects of the revelation being thereby frustrated or impaired. We perceive their utility, but not their necessity. We are bound to believe them not from any intrinsic importance that attaches to them, but merely because God has been pleased to reveal them. These views enable us to form a pretty distinct conception in general of the distinction between things fundamental and non-fundamental, and that may be sufficiently full and accurate for ordinary practical purposes. And we contend that nothing more specific in the way of deciding what points are fundamental and what not, is required in order to our determining upon the truth or falsehood of the doctrine that all things necessary for salvation are clearly revealed in Scripture. The difficulty of the Papists, as adduced against the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture in necessary things, would be a formidable one if we had no other means of determining on the truth or falsehood of the doctrine, but by first finding out precisely what the things are which are necessary to salvation, and then ascertaining whether every one of them is clearly revealed in Scripture or not. But it is at least possible that we may have proof of the truth of this doctrine without needing to have recourse to any such lengthened and tedious process. Supposing that this doctrine had been explicitly and *totidem verbis* affirmed in Scripture, then it would of course be received by all who believed in the divine authority of the Bible, even though they did not precisely know, and had no certain means of knowing, what all the particular points were which were necessary to salvation, and to which the general proposition applied. Now, this is in substance the way in which we establish it, for though it is not asserted in Scripture explicitly and *totidem verbis*, yet we have sufficient materials, in considerations suggested by Scripture, and in statements contained in it, for adopting this conclusion. We know that the great purpose for which a revelation was given was that men might be made wise unto salvation. We know—for that has already been proved under the former head—that the whole counsel of God is contained in the written word; and if the Bible was thus fitted and intended to make men wise

unto salvation, the inference is certain and immediate that it must contain clearly everything necessary for obtaining that object. The doctrine is plainly enough implied in the scriptural statements about the word being a light unto our feet and a lamp unto our path, the entrance of the word giving light, giving understanding to the simple, and many others of similar import. These statements seem clearly fitted and intended to teach us that the word of God has been so framed that it plainly opens up all necessary things to all who have access to it, and who use it aright. Learning is not necessary for attaining a sufficient understanding of these things which are necessary to salvation. The unlearned also may attain to it if they have access to what is really the word of God in a language they understand.



LECTURE XLI.

ALLEGED OBSCURITY OF SCRIPTURE — NECESSITY OF A
LIVING INTERPRETER—FITNESS OF SCRIPTURE TO BE
A RULE OF FAITH.

THIS great truth of the clearness or perspicuity of the Scriptures in all things necessary for salvation may also be confirmed by an examination of the Scriptures themselves, of the way and manner in which their materials are disposed and arranged, and the style and language in which they are written, as well as from the consideration of the effects which by themselves they have often produced in men who had no peculiar natural advantages for understanding them. The arguments for the perspicuity of the Scriptures in necessary things, derived from these different sources, are strong and conclusive, and might easily be illustrated at length. But this is unnecessary. You will see that most of them, especially those derived from the statements of Scripture, and those deduced from God's end or design in giving us the Scriptures and putting them into men's hands, go directly and immediately to establish the general doctrine that the Scriptures are clear in things necessary for salvation, without imposing upon us any necessity of settling or defining precisely beforehand what these necessary things are. The great principle of the perspicuity of the Scriptures in all necessary things is not only asserted in general in the Confession, but is further explained in this way, that these necessary things "are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in the due use of ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them." This, you will observe, is very cautiously and moderately stated, and does not certainly make any unreasonable

demand on our faith in the fitness of God's word for the accomplishment of the object which we know that he intended it to be instrumental in effecting. The inference surely is very clear and certain, that if God has given to men a written revelation of his will, this at least must be true of it. The words, "in some place of Scripture or other," were inserted to guard against an objection sometimes adduced by Papists. They have sometimes pretended to understand Protestants as intending, when asserting the perspicuity of Scripture in necessary things, to maintain by implication this position, that all those parts of Scripture which treat of or refer to necessary or fundamental points are clear or free from obscurity, and on this ground they have imagined that they refuted our general doctrine when they pointed to a passage of Scripture which was plainly enough connected with some point confessedly fundamental, but which yet was by no means free from obscurity. We reply that this assertion proceeds upon an erroneous notion of what is fairly involved in our principle, and of what it is that we really maintain. We do not maintain that every passage of Scripture which bears upon a fundamental or necessary point is clear, but merely that every necessary or fundamental point is clearly propounded in some place of Scripture or other, without denying that there may be places of Scripture where this same fundamental point is propounded less clearly or more obscurely. If our opponents bring forward any point of faith or practice which they can prove, and which we admit to be fundamental, then we are bound to produce some place of Scripture or other where that point is clearly propounded and opened. But we have never undertaken, and we are not bound in consistency or by any logical necessity, to prove that all the passages of Scripture which bear upon that point are clear or perspicuous. The measure or degree of clearness here predicated of Scripture in regard to fundamental points is this, that men without learning may, with due use of the ordinary means, attain to a sufficient understanding of them, *i.e.* may attain to salvation, may acquire that knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ which is eternal life, may be enabled to realise and exhibit that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. For this purpose learning is not indispensable, but the due use of ordinary means is. A man cannot with any propriety be said to have access to the Scriptures, so as to be in a condition of testing

or affording the means of testing their clearness or perspicuity, unless he be able to read them either in the original or in a language with which he is familiar, and into which they have been translated with substantial fidelity and accuracy. An unlearned man may be regarded as one who has not access to the Scriptures in the original languages, but only in a translation, who knows no language but his own, and whose mind has not been much cultivated by reading and study. Even such a man, as experience abundantly proves, may attain to a sufficient understanding of the Scriptures—that is, may find in them all the knowledge necessary for leading him to God through Christ, and conducting him to heaven if he makes a due use of the ordinary means, *i.e.* if he study them with diligence and perseverance, humility and prayer.

It is upon the perfection or sufficiency of the Scriptures, and their perspicuity or clearness in all necessary things, that Protestants found their claim to be received and employed as the only rule of faith and practice; and it is upon a denial of their perfection and perspicuity that Papists and Tractarians maintain that they have no right to occupy such a place or to possess such authority. If they contain the whole counsel of God, and if they are so clear in all necessary or fundamental points that men may attain to a sufficient understanding of them, then men not only are not bound, but they are not at liberty, to take any other rule or standard in seeking to ascertain the mind and will of God. They must concentrate their attention upon the written word, and make it their great object to ascertain its meaning; they may be animated in the discharge of this duty, by the assurance that it is able to make them wise unto salvation, and that with the word of God in their hands, and with opportunities of reading and studying it in a language which they understand, it will be only through their own sin or shortcoming that they will fail in attaining to the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. Papists and Tractarians deny its perfection and sufficiency, and maintain that there are truths which God expects and requires men to believe, though they are not contained in it, but handed down by oral tradition from Christ and his apostles. They deny its clearness even in fundamental things, that they may have an additional ground for asserting the necessity and authority of tradition to

aid in interpreting it, and for exalting the authority of the church, *i.e.* of ecclesiastical authorities. So far the principles and objects of Papists and Tractarians in depreciating the word of God are one and the same. The Papists, however, go somewhat beyond the Tractarians, in more fully and formally deducing from the alleged obscurity of Scripture the necessity of a permanent living interpreter, and it is this mainly that they labour to establish when they urge the obscurity of Scripture. Their views, however, on this subject come practically to much the same point; for while the Papists maintain that it belongs to the church to interpret Scripture, and that she interprets it infallibly, they admit that she must be guided in interpreting it by a regard to the consent of the Fathers, which is just the standard set up by the Tractarians; though nothing is more certain than that this standard has no existence. These views about the necessity and authority of tradition, its right to be received and regarded with equal reverence as the written word, and about the obscurity of the Scriptures, rendering it necessary that they should be kept out of the hands of the people, and explained only by the church as a permanent living interpreter, had never been very fully or formally avowed by the Church of Rome, or at least had not been imposed upon all her subjects as necessary to be believed, till the time of the Council of Trent, although she had long acted upon them in practice; and the reasons which led her then more formally to declare them, and to demand universal assent to them, are abundantly obvious. The Reformation had thrown open the word of God to the people, and it was of importance to the Church of Rome, which loves darkness rather than light, because her deeds are evil, to devise some means or pretences of keeping it out of their hands. If men looked into the Bible at all, and then thought of the Church of Rome, the first thing that must necessarily strike them would be this, that there are many of the doctrines and practices of the Church of Rome of which not a trace or vestige was to be found in the Bible. Tradition supplied them with a ready and convenient answer. These things indeed might not all be found in Scripture, but they had been handed down from the mouth of Christ and his apostles by uninterrupted succession in the Catholic Church, and are therefore to be received with equal piety and reverence as the written

word. This might satisfy some people for a time; but if they continued to study the written word a little more closely and carefully, they could scarcely fail to become more or less deeply impressed with the conviction not only that there are many of the doctrines and practices of the Church of Rome which have no sanction in Scripture, but that there are many of them to which Scripture is decidedly opposed. How was this notion to be met? Discussions about the meaning of scriptural statements the Papists saw were likely to prove troublesome and inconvenient, with such a system of doctrine and practice as they had to defend, and it was therefore thought better to devise some general plan for evading this mode of warfare, either wholly or partially; and accordingly they took this ground. They said the Bible is a very obscure book; it is very difficult to understand it even on important points; it is very dangerous for the laity to have such a book in their hands, for many of them will certainly mistake its meaning and peril their salvation. It is quite unreasonable for private individuals to be at all confident about understanding the meaning of so obscure a book; and in order to make any safe or certain use of it, it requires a permanent living interpreter to whom it belongs to explain it. On such grounds as these, manifestly adopted for the reasons which have just been explained, Popish controversialists think themselves entitled to dispose very summarily of any dispute that may arise about the meaning of a passage of Scripture by an appeal to the church's infallible interpretation. They do not often indeed venture to take such high ground in Protestant countries, and to rest on this as the only answer to our scriptural arguments, and they usually condescend to make some attempt to ward off the weapons we direct against them from the armoury of God's word. They commonly however take care to let us know that when they deign to discuss with us the meaning of a passage of Scripture, they do it *ex gratia* or *ex abundantia*. Bishop Milner, the great champion of Popery in England in the last generation, declares that when a passage of Scripture is adduced against any of the doctrines or practices of the Church of Rome, its advocates are entitled if they choose to dispose of it in this way: "The church understands the passage differently from you, and therefore you mistake its meaning."

Papists, besides labouring to establish the imperfection and

obscurity of Scripture, adduce several considerations of a general kind against the great Protestant doctrine that the written word is the only rule of faith and practice, and in favour of the necessity of a permanent living infallible interpreter ; and one or two of the principal of these it may be proper briefly to advert to. They are in the habit of adducing the fact that, in many ages and countries where Christianity has been known and professed, men in general have not had access to the Bible, and that even yet in some professed Christian countries there are great multitudes who cannot read, as a proof that God did not intend the Bible to be the only rule of faith. But no fact of this sort can counteract the testimony of God himself as to his designs and intentions in the matter. The fact referred to concerns only the sovereignty of God, who gives to men what amount or degree of privileges he chooses, what means of knowing his will he thinks proper. He may have thought proper in his sovereignty not to give to many men access to his written word. He is entitled to demand, and does demand, of all men that they shall improve to the utmost whatever opportunities of knowing his will he may have been pleased to confer ; but he has not imposed upon men any obligation to receive as coming from him anything but what is in accordance with his written word, and he does require of all to whom in his providence he has given access to his word, that they shall make it the only standard of their faith and practice ; that they shall take it, and it alone, as a light unto their feet, and a lamp unto their path. These considerations are quite sufficient to answer the objection which has been stated, and to shew its utter irrelevancy. We are to adore the sovereignty of God in arranging men's lot, and in bestowing upon them the means they possess, be they greater or less, of knowing him and the way of salvation ; and we are to cherish the deepest compassion for those who, though living in professedly Christian countries, are shut out from his word and left to the guidance of Popish priests, blind leaders of the blind. But because in God's sovereignty they are left in this miserable condition, we are not entitled to draw the inference that God's word was not fitted and intended to be the only rule of faith and practice, that they are not entitled to have full access to it, that they would not be bound, if they had access to it, to take it as their standard, and might not in the due use of ordinary means

acquire from it, by God's blessing, a sufficient knowledge of those things which are necessary for salvation. Papists labour assiduously in every way, by all sorts of considerations, to shew that the Bible is not fitted to be the only rule of faith, and have often spoken of the written word with great contempt. And indeed, when discussing the subject, they often speak not only as if they did not regard it as the sole rule of faith, but as if they did not regard it as a rule of faith at all, as if it had no fitness or adaptation whatever to make known to men the will of God. They commonly talk as if they believed that the word of God has done much mischief in the world, that the church and the world would have been in a much better condition if it had never been generally circulated, and would now be greatly improved if it were entirely withdrawn. I do not mean of course that they say all this explicitly and in so many words; but I have no hesitation in saying that many of them have discussed this subject, and have laboured to prove the unfitness of the written word to guide men to a knowledge of God's will, in a strain and spirit which plainly shew that all this is in their hearts, and that they would openly assert it if they thought it safe or expedient. Tractarians practise a little more decency and moderation in speaking of the Bible; but the substance of what Papists assert about its unfitness to make known to us the will of God is plainly insinuated in their favourite maxim that "Tradition teaches, Scripture proves." If it is the word of God, then it was intended to teach; and if it is not fitted to teach, it can scarcely be regarded as the word of God. Indeed, the general strain of Popish statements upon this subject is scarcely consistent with an honest belief that it came from him, and was intended in any way or to any extent to communicate to us his will. In this as in many other subjects, they seem to have no scruple in labouring to overturn the foundations of religion and of truth, if they can only thereby get some apparent advantage over Protestants, or some plausible pretence for advocating submission to the authority of the church. Archbishop Tillotson has strikingly described their conduct in this respect by a fine allusion to what is commonly called the Judgment of Solomon.¹

"These exceptions, if they were true, would not strike at Protestantism, but at the Christian religion, which is the general unhappiness of most of the

¹ *Rule of Faith*, p. 76.

Popish arguments, than which there is no greater evidence that the Church of Rome is not the true mother, because she had rather Christianity should be destroyed than that it should appear that any other church hath a claim to it."

On the general fitness of the written word to teach men the will of God, and to serve as a rule or standard of faith and practice, it is enough to say that God intended it to serve this purpose, and of course has fitted it to effect it, that whatever defects may attach, or be alleged to attach, to the Bible as a channel of conveying to us the will of God, we have no other certain means of knowing what God would have us to believe and to do. He has put the Bible into our hands; he has enjoined us to search it; he has fitted it to make us wise unto salvation; and he has given us good ground to believe that all who make a right improvement of the privilege of having it in the due use of ordinary means not only may, but assuredly will, attain the great end for which this revelation was given them, the salvation of their souls. Christ certainly thought the written word of the Old Testament fitted to teach men and to be a rule of faith, when he enjoined the Jews in general to search it, that they might there find him and eternal life, while he solemnly warned them against the traditions of men, and directed them to no other source from which they might learn the will of God, or which they might employ as a standard of faith or practice. His own discourses he must also have regarded as fitted to teach men the knowledge of divine things, because many of them were spoken openly in the hearing of the multitude. And there can surely be no good reason why these discourses of Christ, which were spoken openly and indiscriminately to the multitude, should, when recorded as they are in the written word, be kept out of men's hands, or be regarded as not fitted to instruct and edify all, be they what they may, within whose reach they may be brought. The epistles of the apostles, which now form so large and so important a part of the New Testament, were addressed openly and indiscriminately to the churches, and were read in the public assemblies; a plain proof that they were fitted and intended to convey a knowledge of the will of God to all who might read or hear them, and who might use them right. The great leading argument against the fitness of the written word to teach men the will of God, and that perhaps mainly employed by

Tractarians to enforce submission in the interpretation of Scripture to what they call Catholic consent, and by Papists to establish the necessity of a permanent, living, infallible interpreter, is the fact that different interpretations have been put upon many portions of Scripture, and the allegation that Scripture cannot settle its own meaning and determine its own sense. That different interpretations have been and still are put upon many parts of Scripture is true; but it does not by any means follow from this, either that it is not fitted to be a rule or standard of faith and practice, or that there is need of a living, infallible interpreter to explain it. Papists commonly allege that it is necessary, in order to the fitness of a rule or standard for its intended object, that it should *de facto* put an end to all disputes or controversies about those matters which it is intended to make known and to regulate. This however is an unreasonable demand. All that is necessary in a rule or standard of faith and practice is, that it really contain all the necessary truth or information, and that this truth or information be so presented and exhibited as that men who have access to it may, in the due use of the ordinary means, attain to a full and certain knowledge of all things necessary for the accomplishment of the ends for which the rule was given. If this can be predicated and proved of Scripture, then its adequacy and fitness as a rule are fully established, and anything seeming to indicate a coming short of what some might have expected from the use of the rule, must be regarded as a proof either that the thing desiderated was not intended to be effected by this rule, or else that it has not been attained, not through any deficiency or inadequacy in the rule, but through the fault of those who have used it, but have not used it aright. We are not entitled to say that God intended and fitted his word to guide man to perfect unanimity of sentiment upon all the topics which are more or less fully adverted to in the Bible. There are different degrees of perspicuity attaching to different portions of Scripture, and to some subjects there brought under our notice, about which churches and individuals have entertained a diversity of sentiment; and we may say, without any irreverence or presumption, that there are subjects adverted to in Scripture which God, if it had so pleased him, might have settled or determined more explicitly and conclusively than he has done. The great primary

object of the written word, that for which it was specially fitted and intended, was to make men wise unto salvation ; to guide them to the knowledge of all truth necessary, according to God's own arrangements, to be known, believed, and practised for their eternal welfare ; and it is fully adequate for this object, if it is such as that men without learning may, in the due use of the ordinary means, attain to a sufficient understanding of all necessary things. Papists must prove that the Scripture does not reveal all fundamental and necessary points so clearly that men, unless through their own fault, may acquire a knowledge of them, before they can found any argument for the unfitness or inadequacy of the Bible as a rule of faith upon the diversity of interpretations which have been put upon its statements on some points of inferior importance ; otherwise they must be regarded as charging God foolishly. In discussing this subject, they commonly enumerate all the sects to be found among Protestants, and draw a picture of the differences of opinion existing upon many points among them. They commonly exaggerate greatly the number and magnitude of these differences ; for there is really no great difference among Protestant churches upon fundamental points. They agree to a large extent upon all necessary things ; upon those things the knowledge and belief of which is necessary to salvation. It was to illustrate this important and satisfactory truth that about the end of the sixteenth century a work was prepared, called the *Harmony of the Protestant Confessions*, in which all the Confessions of the Protestant churches were introduced ; the portions of each of the Confessions bearing upon the important matters of faith and practice usually set forth in symbolic books being placed together in immediate succession, that thus the substantial harmony of them all might be clearly and palpably brought out. This work has been recently republished in this country, and is fitted to exert a wholesome influence at a time when it is so important that Protestant churches should be closely and cordially united in opposing the growing influence of the man of sin, whether in the form of open Popery or Tractarianism. God has not only so framed his word as to fit it for guiding all who use it aright into the knowledge of all necessary truth, but he has pledged himself that all who do so shall attain to the knowledge

of all necessary truth, and to the salvation which is connected with it. And this surely is enough. None to whom the Bible has been made known will fail in learning everything necessary to be believed and practised, except through their own fault.

There is indeed a truth and an error in regard to every subject brought before us in Scripture, and men are bound assiduously and perseveringly to use every means in their power in order to gain a complete and correct knowledge of all that God's word contains; but correct views upon every point contained in Scripture are not necessary for men's salvation. As it is not necessary for the great purpose for which the Scriptures were given, that all men who study them should interpret every portion of them in the same way, or entertain the same views upon all the subjects that they embrace, so for the same reason and upon the same ground it is not necessary that there be a permanent, living, infallible interpreter of Scripture. The Scripture is divinely fitted for all the purposes which God intended it to serve, but it was not one of these purposes to put *de facto* an end to all diversity of opinion among men upon all religious subjects. It is true that all error in the interpretation of Scripture is traceable to something defective or improper in the way in which men use the word of God; and it is also true that men are not only bound themselves to use all means of attaining a thorough knowledge of all that God has revealed, but likewise to assist their fellow-men in acquiring thoroughly correct views of the whole of God's truth. But he does not insist on freedom from all error, and entire accordance of sentiment among his people, as indispensable to their salvation. And if he had intended to exact this, he would have made all Scripture throughout as clear and plain upon every point as it is upon all necessary and fundamental subjects. And if it be lawful to argue at all upon what God would or should have done, we might be warranted in saying, that if it had been the will of God *for the reasons and the objects commonly alleged by Papists*, to have appointed an infallible interpreter of his word, who was authoritatively to declare its meaning, and to whose decision all men were to be bound to submit, he would have distinctly and explicitly informed us of this in his word, and given us directions which no man could misunderstand, without the grossest carelessness and perversity, for ascertaining who or what this infallible

interpreter was, and where his decisions were to be found. But as this is manifestly not the case, as there is no clear indication in Scripture of the appointment of an infallible interpreter, and least of all of the investiture of the Church of Rome with any such function, the pretended infallible interpreter has in point of fact thoroughly failed in securing unanimity in the interpretation of Scripture among those who all profess to receive it as the word of God. Papists surely who think that an infallible interpreter has been appointed and authorised by God, and has been always executing his functions in the church, should be constrained to confess that a provision which might be made for effecting such a result, might yet be abused, and might come short of its object through the sin and perversity of man. The Scripture is actually instrumental in effecting the great leading object which its author intended it to effect, the salvation of all those who make a right use and improvement of it; and it comes short of effecting certain other subordinate though in some respects desirable objects, not through any positive deficiency or unfitness of its own, but through the negligence or perversity of those who fail to employ and improve it aright.



LECTURE XLII.

INFALLIBILITY OF THE CHURCH—TESTIMONY OF THE FATHERS.

THE subject of the rule of faith, taken in its more strict and limited sense, comprehends only the investigation of this question: Where is the supernaturally revealed will of God to be found? The Protestant answer to this infinitely important question is, that it is to be found in the canonical Scripture, excluding the Apocrypha, and nowhere else. The Popish answer is, that it is to be found partly in the written word, including the Apocrypha, and partly in unwritten traditions, *i.e.* doctrines and precepts alleged to have been delivered orally by Christ and his apostles, and to have been handed down in unbroken succession in the church. Protestants admit that they are bound to receive as part of the rule of faith whatever it can be proved that Christ or his apostles delivered as matter of public instruction to the church; but they contend—first, that we have not the slightest ground to believe that God ever intended that any part of the revelation made to men through Christ and his apostles should be handed down by tradition; and second, that there is not in existence any one doctrine or precept, not contained in or deducible from the written word, which can be proved to have been delivered by Christ or his apostles. Thus we establish what divines commonly call the perfection of the sacred Scripture, as the only record or repository of the will of God, to the exclusion of all oral tradition. And when it is once proved that the revealed will of God is contained in certain books and nowhere else, that the canonical books of Scripture were all given by inspiration of God, and that we have no other certain means of knowing his revealed will than

by ascertaining the meaning of their statements, the subject of the rule of faith in the more strict and limited meaning of the words may be said to be exhausted. Tradition, however, which is introduced by Papists and Tractarians in opposition to the perfection of Scripture, is also brought by the same parties to bear upon the interpretation of the Bible, upon the question not merely in what records the revealed will of God is to be found, but also how the meaning of these records is to be ascertained. They deny and labour to disprove the perfection of Scripture, in order that they may establish the necessity and validity of tradition as a divine informant; and they deny and labour to disprove the perspicuity or clearness of Scripture, even in things necessary for salvation, in order that they may establish the necessity of calling in the aid of tradition in interpreting it. Tradition being thus introduced into the question, as a distinct and independent topic, has been usually discussed by divines in detail at this place and in this connection, as brought forward in opposition, both to the perfection and the perspicuity of Scripture, though it is only in its relation to the former of these that it properly bears upon the question what the rule or standard of faith is; while in its relation to the latter it rather belongs to the subsequent inquiry as to how this rule or standard of faith is to be interpreted and applied, so that its meaning may be ascertained. And in accordance with the arrangement usually adopted, for the reasons just stated, we have adverted as far as seemed necessary to the whole subject of tradition, in its relation to the perspicuity as well as the perfection of Scripture, under the general head of the rule of faith. The perfection of Scripture is at once a more important and a more definite subject of investigation than its perspicuity. The most important and fundamental of all questions is, Where have we revealed the will of God? Can we prove that it is all here, so that it is not necessary, and we are not under any obligation, to seek for it anywhere else, and have only to ascertain the meaning of the record? And we have much reason to be thankful for the abundant evidence God has given us that it is all contained in the canonical Scriptures, that it all lies before us, stated with infallible accuracy, in the Bible. This conclusion, while it leaves us at full liberty to make use of any assistance which may be rationally derived from tradition, or from any other source, in

ascertaining the meaning of the written word, not only exempts us from all obligation to receive as based upon divine authority anything which cannot be shewn to be sanctioned by the Scriptures, but renders it our duty, from a regard at once to the honour of God and our own welfare, to refuse to receive anything which is urged upon us as a matter either of faith or practice, but unsanctioned by the written word, a course which is not only indicated but imposed as matter of obligation by our Saviour's conduct in regard to the traditions of the Pharisees, as exhibited especially in his positive refusal to comply with the tradition about washing of hands.

The question of the perspicuity of Scripture is in some measure one of degree. We admit that there is obscurity in the Bible, and merely contend that it is clear in all things necessary to be known, believed, and practised for salvation ; while the measure of the perspicuity predicated of it even in these things does not from the nature of the case admit of being very precisely defined or described. But this is of the less practical importance, because even if the Bible were less clear than it is, it might still be true—nay, we could still be able to prove that it is true—that we have no other certain way of knowing God's will but by ascertaining its meaning, and that he has not appointed any authoritative or infallible interpreter whose decisions as to the meaning of the written word we are called upon to receive. There is another subject to which reference has been repeatedly made, and which as well as tradition occupies a sort of intermediate place between the subject of the rule of faith and that of the interpretation of Scripture, viz., what is commonly called the authority or infallibility of the church. The full discussion of this topic would require an investigation of the whole subject of the constitution, functions, and government of the church of Christ as a visible society, as this is unfolded in Scripture, and thus falls to be considered at a much later period in your studies, when according to the arrangement usually adopted by systematic theologians, your attention is directed to the head which they entitle *De Ecclesia*. Upon this ground I do not at present mean to attempt anything like a discussion of this important subject, but merely to make a few miscellaneous remarks upon one aspect of it, viz., the relation in which it stands to the subject of the rule of faith and the interpretation of Scrip-

ture. Papists generally maintain the doctrine of the infallibility of the church, and they profess to be able to establish this important doctrine from Scripture. It could not of course be received upon any other authority than that of God himself, for if the doctrine be true, it virtually puts the church, whatever that may mean, or wherever the infallibility predicated of it may reside, in the room and stead of God himself, so far as the revelation of truth binding men's consciences is concerned. It is rather remarkable however that the Church of Rome has not found it convenient to give any formal or official declaration as to the precise nature and import of this doctrine, or as to the party in whom the alleged infallibility resides. It seems in the highest degree probable that if such authority had been by God's appointment vested in the church, this would have been very clearly and explicitly asserted in Scripture, and that abundant materials would have been afforded there for enabling men to know where this infallibility was vested, and that the church which claimed it would have fully determined and openly proclaimed what the precise source was from which infallible decisions were to be asked and expected. And it is sufficient to overturn this whole claim as advanced by the Church of Rome, that she has never decided,¹ and dares not attempt to decide, the controversies existing in her own body as to what the party is which possesses this important attribute of infallibility, whether, as some contend, the Pope, or as others allege, a general council, or, as a third party maintains, evidently for the mere purpose of glossing over the difficulty, the Pope and a general council together. Notwithstanding this serious difficulty, which is sufficient to entitle us to dismiss the whole subject without examination, many Popish writers have made great use of this claim to infallibility, bringing it in on every occasion to remove every objection and to solve every difficulty, as if a decision of any theological, ecclesiastical, or religious question by the existing authorities of the church were at any time sufficient to determine it satisfactorily and conclusively. Some however of the more cautious and moderate Papists have defined more precisely the functions of this infallible authority, the subjects to which it applies, and the sphere within which it operates. And in so far as our present subject is concerned, viz., the way or manner of

¹ This she has now done.—*Ed.*

ascertaining certainly the divine will revealed, they hold that it is chiefly exhibited and exercised—first, in determining authoritatively what are the unwritten doctrines and precepts which were delivered by the apostles and have been handed down by tradition; and second, in deciding what is the true meaning of scriptural statements. The practical difference between the more reckless and the more cautious Papists in regard to the exercise of infallibility in these two departments lies chiefly in this, that the former would have men take the church's declaration as sufficient authority for any assertion she may make as to the apostolicity of traditions and the meaning of scriptural statements, while the latter admit that she is called upon to produce some feasible or plausible evidence that the particular tradition was received in the primitive church, and may therefore be regarded as having come from the apostles, and that the interpretation proposed for a scriptural statement has some foundation in the words in which the statement is expressed. The former is the view which is practically inculcated by the great body of the Popish priesthood, and received and acted on by the great body of their people; and the latter of course is that which is usually put forth by the defenders of Popery when they are called upon to engage in controversy with Protestants.

With respect to the first of these subjects, viz., traditions, Papists admit that some evidence must be produced that they were generally held and received in the early church. The only rational evidence of this is to be found in the writings which have come down to us from that period, and the Church of Rome has certainly no special or peculiar advantages for ascertaining the meaning of these productions of antiquity, and deducing from them what were the doctrines and practices that generally obtained in the church, from the time of the apostles, beyond what Protestants enjoy. The Church of Rome, conscious that there were many of her traditions which she could not prove to have been generally received in the early church by any authentic and genuine documents, has forged many works, and ascribed them to men who flourished in early times. Many of these forgeries have been detected by Protestants, and in not a few cases the fraud has been so conclusively exposed, that the Papists have been compelled to admit it. Indeed, one of the first points that requires to

be attended to and disposed of in discussing this subject, is to determine what are the genuine writings of the Fathers, and not merely what are their genuine writings, but whether particular passages, now found in writings admitted to be in the main genuine, originally formed a part of them ; for Papists have not only forged many writings ascribing to the early Fathers, works which they never wrote, but they have corrupted and interpolated them to a large extent, by inserting passages which favour their own modern inventions. These facts—and Protestant writers have established them by unquestionable evidence—are not fitted to produce any prepossession in favour of the claim of the Church of Rome to infallibility or authority in declaring and enforcing apostolical traditions. The question of the genuineness and integrity of the writings ascribed to the Fathers is of course to be decided by the ordinary principles of the historical evidence applicable to such matters. Not only has the Church of Rome no peculiar claim to decide such questions, and no peculiar facilities for doing so, but she has been conclusively convicted not only of error but of fraud upon many of the most important points involved in this subject. Notwithstanding the zealous efforts of the Church of Rome to make the writings of the Fathers more numerous by forgery, and their testimony more explicit by mutilation and interpretation, the materials, apart from Scripture, for ascertaining what were the doctrines and practices that obtained upon many subjects in the primitive church, an essential step it is admitted towards proving any point to be an apostolical tradition, are not very full or satisfactory. And be they what they may, they are just as accessible to Protestants as to Papists ; and the former are just as well entitled and as well qualified for using and applying them for the purpose of ascertaining whether they afford any evidence of apostolical traditions as the latter. If the Church of Rome could prove that she has the promise of the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit in declaring what are apostolical traditions, or that she has been invested by God with authority to declare anything she chooses to be an apostolical tradition, of course the controversy would be settled. But if ordinary historical evidence is at all admissible in deciding upon such questions, they must be decided throughout by a fair and unshrinking application of the principles of evidence. The fitness of any man or body of men to decide them must be

determined solely by their access to the materials of evidence, and their capacity of making a right use and application of them. Protestants have not shrunk from encountering Papists upon this field of the evidence that exists in the writings of the Fathers, of what were the views that generally prevailed in the primitive church on the various points in controversy between them, and have carried off a decided victory. Even the Tractarians admit, as we have seen, that the Church of Rome has in some instances erred historically in setting forth as apostolical traditions points which cannot be proved to have been generally held in the primitive church; nay, which it can be proved were not then generally received. There is scarcely any one of the leading general aspects of the Popish controversy in which the argument of Protestants is more triumphant than in proving that the Church of Rome has required men to receive as apostolical traditions points which were not generally held by the church in the first centuries, and which therefore cannot be proved to have come from the apostles. The most conclusive evidence that a church is not infallible is the proof that she has erred; and while we can prove that the Church of Rome is not infallible by shewing that many of her doctrines are contrary to Scripture, we can establish the same general position by proving that many of her pretended apostolical traditions were utterly unknown in the church in primitive times, and therefore were not delivered to the churches by the apostles. This controversy, indeed, in its details is not a very important or a very interesting one. There are few things more wearisome than to follow the track of some of the old controversies between Protestants and Papists about the views of the Fathers, and of the primitive church on the various points in dispute, as there is often a great deal of obscurity and confusion in the extracts produced on both sides, and much tedious and involved investigation of the context and of statements made by the author in other places in order to bring out his real meaning. Amid the confusion and obscurity with which the writings of many of the Fathers abound, the Papists have been able to produce some passages which appear to countenance some of their doctrines and practices, and the germs or radical elements of some of the corruptions of Popery began to appear in the church at an earlier period than perhaps is commonly supposed; but the proper question in

regard to any point in dispute is not whether or not one or two of the Fathers may have given some countenance to the Popish error or to something like it, but whether the writings of the Fathers contain any materials sufficient to prove that the point under consideration was delivered by the apostles to the churches, and continued from the apostolic age to be generally received upon their authority.

The evidence of the errors which have been committed by the Church of Rome about the apostolic origin and authority of particular traditions, and which of course not only disprove the authority of the particular traditions, but also the church's general claim to infallibility, it is scarcely worth your while to investigate; but you ought to know something of the general principles and considerations applicable to the use that has been, or should be, made of the writings of the Fathers in establishing apostolical traditions, and of the evidence which the general aspect of the case affords against the claim of the Church of Rome to anything like infallibility, or even actual freedom from error in professing to make known what the apostles orally delivered. The standard work on this general question is Daille or Dallæus's *De usu Patrum*, of which Warburton said that it brought the Fathers from the bench to the bar. It was published originally both in French and in Latin, and an old English translation of it has been recently republished in this country, as being eminently suited to the present times in consequence of the prevalence of tractarianism. It is a book of decided ability and great learning, and is well deserving of a perusal. It is of more importance however to advert to the alleged authority or infallibility of the church in interpreting Scripture, because Scripture exists and is the word of God, whereas there are no authentic apostolical traditions in matters of faith and practice to be found in the writings of the Fathers, or anywhere else. The Church of Rome has expressly declared that it belongs to her to judge of the true sense and interpretation of Scripture. But she has never been able to produce from Scripture any commission to this effect, and therefore we are under no obligation to admit her claim. This is in many respects the most important part of her general claim to infallibility. It is principally upon the ground of this right that she claims the submission of men's understandings and consciences to all her decisions; and every consideration which she thinks tends

to evince the necessity of a permanent living infallible interpreter, anything that can be extracted from the promises to the church, and from the scriptural statements about the ordinary exercise of ecclesiastical authority by spiritual office-bearers, she has brought to bear in support of it. The claim is from its very nature an absurd one, and cannot possibly commend itself to the understandings of rational men. Christ might have promised so to guide his church by his Spirit into all truth, and have so pointed out the source from which the decisions of the church were to be learned, by directing us to the Pope, or to a general council, as that we must have been bound to receive whatever they might declare ; but unless the Scripture had been so obscure throughout as to be unintelligible, such a provision or arrangement must have virtually abrogated the authority of the written word. For if the Scripture be intelligible at all, it is not possible that men can believe that *that* is the right interpretation of any of its statements which may be proved to be inconsistent with the meaning of the words themselves ascertained in the ordinary rational way. But let us briefly advert to the grounds on which this claim is based, and to the way in which the right claimed has been exercised.

[Notes to Stillingfleet, pp. 155, 156, 157, and 135, 136, 137, 138 ; 2d. edition, pp. 208 to 212 and pp. 186 to 189 ; commend books as in Notes to Stillingfleet, p. 198, and 2d edition 214, with addition of *Theses Salmurienses* and *Theses Sedanenses*, which are specially recommended.]



LECTURE XLIII.

GENERAL INTEGRITY OF THE ORIGINAL TEXT OF SCRIPTURE

—CONFESSION, CHAP. I. SEC. 8.

HAVING shewn that the written word of God, as contained in the canonical Scriptures, is the only rule of faith and practice, we are now called upon to consider how it ought to be used and applied so that it may produce its intended effects upon the church and the world, upon individuals and communities. And here we have first to attend to the public or general use of the Bible as a whole, and then to the interpretation of it, or the accurate investigation of its doctrines and precepts, and of the meaning of its particular statements. The eighth section of the first chapter respects the first of these subjects, and the ninth section the second of them. The eighth section is this, "The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old) and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations) being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical, so as in all controversies of religion the church is finally to appeal to them. But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded in the fear of God to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar tongue of every nation into which they come, that the word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner, and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope." We do not mean to enter into anything like a minute explanation of these statements, although

there are some important scriptural truths here set forth. The first doctrine here declared which it is necessary to advert to is that the Bible in the original languages has been by God's singular care and providence kept pure in all ages. And here we have to attend first to the cause which is alleged to have been in operation, and then to the result ascribed to it. The cause is the singular care and providence of God, and the result is the purity of the Bible in the original languages. That God should have watched over his word with care, in order to preserve it from destruction and corruption, *i.e.* in order to prevent the frustration of the great ends for which it was given, is what might have been reasonably expected beforehand, and it has been fully confirmed by experience. There is always considerable doubt and uncertainty attaching to *a priori* speculations about the divine procedure, and some such unwarranted speculations have been indulged in upon this subject. Some of the opponents of the verbal inspiration of Scripture have argued that if God inspired the words he would also have exercised a minute superintendence over the transcription of every copy, so as to preserve accurately and certainly the precise words originally employed. We admit that no such superintendence was exercised over the transcription of the copies of the Scriptures. This indeed would have involved a constant miracle, and it is contradicted by actual experience; but we consider it presumptuous and sophistical to argue back from this against the inspiration of the words. The argument virtually proceeds upon this assumption, that whatever reasons might have led God to suggest or dictate the words of Scripture, must have also constrained him to preserve every identical word as originally dictated, whatever amount of miraculous interposition this might require. And independently of the unwarranted presumption of such a position, which is quite sufficient to entitle us to set it aside, we can positively shew that most important results might be and have been effected by the original inspiration of the words, which did not require a constant miraculous superintendence sufficient to preserve every one of them, and which have not been frustrated by the admitted want of this. The singular care and providence of God in watching over his word to preserve it from corruption is not then to be regarded as miraculous, but as exercised in the ordinary course of his provi-

dential government of the church and the world. We cannot lay our hands upon anything which God ever did for preserving his word and securing its integrity and purity that can be properly called miraculous in the ordinary meaning of the word. But when we survey the history of the Bible, the dangers of destruction or corruption to which it has been exposed, first from Pagan and then from Papal Rome, the great probability that, humanly speaking, and according to the ordinary course of events, these two great enemies of God and his cause might have destroyed or corrupted it, we are fully warranted in ascribing it to the singular, though not miraculous, care and providence of God that his word has not only been preserved, but preserved in purity and integrity. God specially watched over it, and the result has been that it has always existed and still exists in the original languages in a state of purity. When we say that the word of God in the original languages has been kept pure in all ages, it is not meant that *all* the words contained in the Bible as we have it can be proved to be or *are* precisely those which proceeded from the inspired writers.

There are some small portions of the Bible in regard to which it is doubtful, and the doubt cannot be altogether removed, whether or not they ought to stand as part of the sacred text; and there are passages where it is doubtful, and the doubt cannot be fully and certainly resolved, whether one word or phrase or a different one proceeded from the original authors. This is certain, and in regard to the Greek New Testament has been always known and conceded. For a long period many denied that there was any uncertainty about any portion of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, or even any various readings of any of the passages it contains. This was commonly called the doctrine of the Hebrew verity, and was strenuously maintained by most Protestant writers till after the period when the Westminster Confession was composed. We have no doubt that the members of the Westminster Assembly held the doctrine of the Hebrew verity, and would have ascribed, had they been called upon to express an opinion upon the subject, a greater degree of purity to the Hebrew of the Old than to the Greek of the New Testament. But as the statement before us respects equally the Greek text, in which they would have admitted various readings, and the Hebrew, in which they

would probably have denied their existence, it is plain that this assertion of their purity was not intended to have respect to any circumstance so insignificant comparatively as that in which they probably supposed the Greek and Hebrew text to have differed, but generally to their freedom from any material or substantial error. The reason why this distinction was then generally made between the Hebrew and Greek text was because there had not then been any such examination of Hebrew MSS. as established *de facto* the existence of various readings. It was not based upon any considerations of a general or *a priori* kind. Accordingly the matter is thus put by Dr Owen. In answer to the allegation that it was ridiculous to admit various readings in the Greek and deny them in the Hebrew, he says:—

“Why is this so ridiculous? It is founded on no less stable a bottom than this experience, that whereas we evidently find various lections in the Greek copies which we enjoy, and so grant that which ocular inspection evinces to be true; yet although men discover such bitter and virulent spirits against the Hebrew text, yet there are none of them able to shew out of any copies yet extant in the world, or that they can make appear ever to have been extant, that ever there were any such various lections in the originals of the Old Testament.”¹

It was not till last century that there was anything like a full examination and collection of Hebrew MSS. establishing that there were various readings in the originals of the Old as well as of the New Testament, although it must be admitted that the doctrine of the Hebrew verity so strenuously contended for by Dr Owen had been generally abandoned before that time. Nothing is asserted in the Confession with regard to the Hebrew text which is not equally applied to the Greek, and as various readings were then known and admitted to exist in the Greek text, the purity here predicated of both could not have been intended to be a purity which was exclusive of various readings, but merely such a purity as excluded any material or important corruption. And that we have the text of the originals of the Old and New Testaments in a state of what may most justly be called purity and integrity cannot reasonably be doubted, nay, can be fully established, by the appropriate evidence applicable to the subject, the evidence of MSS., ancient versions, and statements and quotations

¹ *Epistle dedicatory to Divine Origin*, vol. iv. p. 383.

in ancient authors. There is no evidence on the other side that is worthy of examination. Vague allegations have occasionally been made that the original texts of the Old and New Testaments have been to some extent depraved or corrupted. These allegations have been made chiefly by Papists and infidels; by Papists for the purpose of lessening the authority of the written word, establishing the authority of the church, and increasing the credit of the Latin Vulgate, which the Council of Trent decreed was upon no account or pretence to be rejected; and by infidels in order to undermine the authority of Christianity altogether. Hence this subject of the purity and integrity of the original text has been introduced as one of the topics of discussion into the controversies between Protestants and Papists, and you will find it discussed in some of the old systems—Turretine, for example—under the head *De Puritate Fontium*. And Owen, in the work from which we have just quoted on the integrity and purity of the Hebrew and Greek text, makes it very manifest that the consideration which made him so jealous of various readings was that they were eagerly laid hold of by Popish writers, and employed as pretexts for undermining the authority of the originals. But neither Papists nor infidels have ever been able to produce anything plausible in support of their denial of the integrity and purity of the original texts. Some of the Fathers have indeed charged the Jews with having designedly corrupted the text of the Old Testament, in order to evade the force of the scriptural evidence for the Messiahship of Jesus. This charge seems to have originated in the facts that the Fathers generally were very ignorant of Hebrew, and found it convenient sometimes to adopt this compendious way of answering Jewish objections, and that many of them believed in the fable which long obtained in the church of the divine origin and inspiration of the Septuagint Greek version of the Old Testament. No evidence of this charge against the Jews has ever been produced, and it has never gained much credit, but, on the contrary, may be said to have been universally rejected by competent judges. It was held only by some of the Fathers, while others denied it. It was received indeed, among other absurdities, in the early part of last century, by the learned but eccentric Whiston, who thus afforded a handle to infidels, of which Collins did not fail to take

advantage. Whiston's arguments in support of the corruption of the Old Testament by the Jews in the second century have been fully answered in the third part of Carpsovius's *Critica Sacra*. Indeed, nothing has been or can be established against the integrity and purity of the original text which affords any plausible handle, either to infidels or Papists, or which in the least affects the truth or certainty of any one of the doctrines or precepts of Christianity, or the greatly superior purity of the originals to any existing translation.

We have said there are a few passages in regard to which it is doubtful whether they ought to stand as part of the sacred text or not, and that there are various readings, *i.e.* passages where it is not very certain which of two or more readings ought to be regarded as genuine. The subject of various reading we shall reserve to a future lecture, and shall briefly advert at present to the general subject of the passages in the New Testament, about whose right to a place in the sacred text some doubt has been entertained. The sources from which we learn what is the true and pure text of the Bible, as it came from the authors, are the MSS. which have come down to us, the ancient versions of the Bible, known or presumed to have been made from MSS. then in existence, and quotations from Scripture in the writings of ancient authors, presumed also to have been taken from the MSS. they used, or statements made by them as to what these MSS. contained. Manuscripts are the direct and primary source of our knowledge of the sacred text, the appropriate evidence bearing upon the settlement of this subject; ancient versions and quotations in ancient writers being relevant and important only in so far as they afford proofs or presumptions of what was found in MSS. at the time they were made. But these secondary sources of information are the more important in settling the text of the New Testament, and to the New Testament we mean to confine our few remarks, because we have remains at least of versions of it, and we have quotations from it, made at an earlier period than any MSS. now known to exist. Now, when we say that there are passages found generally in our Greek New Testament, to whose claim to a place there some doubt attaches, we mean that there are passages in regard to which there are some materials derived from these legitimate sources which, taken by themselves, would shew that they

are genuine, and others which, taken by themselves, seem to indicate that they are not, and that we are therefore under the necessity of estimating on which side the greatest amount of evidence lies. There are no passages not contained in our ordinary editions of the Greek Testament, which have any plausible claim to a place in the sacred text, no pretence for alleging that any portion of the canonical books has perished ; but there are some passages found in most editions of the Greek Testament whose claim to a place there has been disputed, and upon grounds which, in a few cases, are sufficient to render their claim at least very doubtful. We may refer to some of these, not for the purpose of discussing the evidence bearing upon their genuineness, but merely of pointing out to you more distinctly a class of subjects the study of which is entitled to some share of your attention. The genuineness of the first two chapters of the Gospels both of Matthew and Luke, has been called in question, chiefly by Socinians, on account of the impossibility of evading the proof they afford, if genuine, of the miraculous conception of our Saviour ; while some, who are not Unitarians, have been tempted to give some countenance to the omission of the first two chapters of Matthew, on account of the supposed difficulty of explaining and vindicating some of the applications there made of some Old Testament statements and reconciling the two genealogies. There is however no rational critical ground for denying or doubting the genuineness of these four chapters, for they are found in all ancient MSS. and versions, and there is no more reason for omitting them than for omitting any other portion of the New Testament, which some men may not like or may be averse to receive. The passages in the New Testament of which the genuineness has been disputed, and which come next to these in point of length, are the last eleven verses of Mark's Gospel, and the first eleven verses of the eighth chapter of John's Gospel, containing the account of the woman taken in adultery. Of both these paragraphs, it is true that some MSS. and some ancient versions have them, and some omit them, and therefore as this cannot as a matter of fact be disputed, we must weigh the evidence on both sides, and endeavour to ascertain which preponderates. Different opinions have been entertained concerning the genuineness of these two passages by competent judges, though, I am inclined to think, that when you have an

opportunity of examining the matter, you will probably have no great difficulty in coming to the conclusion that there is a preponderance both of authority and of critical testimony in support of their claim to a place in the sacred text, the preponderance however being clearer and stronger in the case of the paragraph of Mark than in that of John. There are three shorter passages the genuineness of which has been disputed, and the claim of which to a place in the sacred text, at least in the case of two of them, must be admitted to be involved in greater doubt than those longer passages already referred to. They are Luke xxii. 43, 44—"And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony, he prayed most earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground;" Matthew vi. 13, latter clause, what is commonly called the doxology of the Lord's prayer, and which is not found in the Lord's prayer as given in Luke's Gospel; and John v. last clause of verse 3 and verse 4, the words "waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had." Now, of all these passages it is true, as a matter of fact, that there are MSS., ancient versions, and the declarations and quotations of Fathers, both for and against their genuineness, and that it cannot be settled with any very great certainty whether they ought to stand as part of the sacred text or not. There is a considerable preponderance of critical evidence in favour of the passage in Luke about our Saviour's agony, and an angel strengthening him, and it has been generally regarded as genuine. But in regard to the other two, the doxology of the Lord's prayer, and the angel troubling the water, men equally competent to judge of, and to estimate the critical evidence, and equally disposed to reverence the word of God, and to maintain the integrity and purity of the sacred text, have taken opposite sides upon the question of their genuineness. There is one other passage found in the ordinary editions of the New Testament, whose genuineness has been disputed, and it stands in this peculiar predicament, that its genuineness has been abandoned by the great majority of those who have examined the subject with care, even though believing in the truth and divine authority of the doctrine

which it teaches. It is what is commonly called "the heavenly witnesses" spoken of in 1 John v. 7—"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one." There can be no reasonable doubt that there is a decided preponderance of critical evidence from MSS., ancient versions, and the testimonies of the Fathers, against the genuineness of this verse, and that therefore it is more than probable that it did not form a part of the sacred text, as it proceeded from the hand of the inspired apostle.

There are no passages not contained in our ordinary editions of the Greek Testament in behalf of which anything like a plausible claim to form part of the sacred text has been or can be put forth, and those to which we have referred are the chief ones whose genuineness has been plausibly contested. In regard to almost all of them there is a preponderance of evidence in their favour, and there is not adequate ground for denying that they came from God, and were dictated by the Holy Spirit. Even if they were more numerous than they are, and if their genuineness were more doubtful than it is, they could afford no adequate ground for doubting or denying the substantial purity or integrity of the sacred text, its perfect sufficiency for all the purposes which it was intended to serve as an inspired revelation of God's will. And it is to be observed that the position that the word of God has been kept pure in all ages does not necessarily imply that it has existed in purity in any one particular MS., or that it now exists in purity in any one particular printed edition, but merely that God has preserved it in purity in his church, and has given to men sufficient materials, in due use of ordinary means, for obtaining a substantially accurate record of what he has revealed. In the passage of the Confession which we are considering there are two statements made concerning the sacred text in the original languages, and from these two a third is deduced. The two preliminary positions are, that it was immediately inspired by God, and that it has by him been kept pure in all ages; and the practical conclusion deduced from these positions is that in all controversies of religion the church is finally to appeal to it—*i.e.* to the sacred text in the original languages of Hebrew and Greek. If these books were originally dictated by the Holy Ghost, and if they have been kept pure, the conclusion is inevitable that they must form the

ultimate standard of appeal whenever a question arises as to what is the will of God revealed for men's salvation, for the determination of men's opinions and the regulation of their conduct. It might have been supposed that there was no great need of formally asserting such a proposition as this ; but in regard to almost every portion of religious truth the church of Christ is called upon to oppose and contend with the mystery of iniquity. The adherents of the Church of Rome have laboured to undermine the authority of the sacred Scriptures in the original languages as the ultimate standard of appeal, and therefore it becomes the true church of Christ to assert and maintain their supremacy. The Church of Rome has not formally denied the authority and supremacy of the Hebrew and Greek originals, but she has practically substituted the Latin Vulgate in their room. The decree of the Council of Trent upon the subject was this : " That the Vulgate Latin was to be regarded as authentic in all public readings, disputations, preachings, and expositions, and that no one upon any pretence should dare or presume to reject it." Now this decree, in the natural and obvious meaning of the words, makes the Latin Vulgate the ultimate standard of appeal in all controversies of religion. But most Papists of real learning have been thoroughly ashamed of this decree, as well as of the other, passed at the same session by not more than fifty bishops, canonising the Apocrypha; and as they have made much use of the distinction of proto-canonical and deuterocanonical in order to seem to escape from the degradation of holding the doctrine of the Council of Trent, to which they are all pledged, and which unquestionably puts the Apocrypha upon the same level with the canonical Scriptures, so they have invented a pretext for explaining away the natural and proper meaning of the decree about the Latin Vulgate. They allege that that decree was not intended to hold up the Latin Vulgate as the ultimate authoritative standard of God's written word, but only as superior and preferable to all other translations. And it is true that the decree is introduced with some reference to other Latin versions, and the necessity of making some selection among them ; but in the body of the decree the words are absolute and unqualified, and forbid the rejection of it upon any pretence. And besides, in the immediately preceding decree concerning the canonical Scriptures, after a formal enumeration of all the books of Scripture, including

the Apocrypha, an anathema is denounced against any one "who does not receive as sacred and canonical these entire books, with all their parts, according as they have been usually read in the Catholic Church, and are contained in the Vulgate Latin edition." Some Papists have defended the principle, which seems most obviously taught by the council, and have openly maintained that the original text is not the ultimate standard of appeal, but the Latin Vulgate. You may probably have heard of the profane observation of Cardinal Ximeues, to whom we are indebted for the *Complutensian Polyglot*, comparing the Latin Vulgate placed in columns between the Hebrew and Greek originals to our Saviour upon the cross between the two thieves; and even at a later period, when such critical investigations had been more attended to and were better understood, the editor of the *Paris Polyglot*, in his preface to that work, did not hesitate to make this declaration: "Pro certo et indubitato apud nos esse debet vulgatam editionem quæ communi catholicæ ecclesiæ lingua circumfertur verum esse ac genuinum scripturæ fontem."¹ Papists who advocate such notions usually base them upon a denial of the purity of the sacred text in the originals, and labour to prove that they have been corrupted, while they contend that the Vulgate Latin was translated from the originals before these corruptions were introduced, and has been preserved in purity from the apostolic age till the present day. And even some Popish authors who have not ventured formally to assert that the Latin Vulgate should supersede the originals as the ultimate standard of appeal, such as Bellarmine for example, have shewn that they were very willing to assist in disproving the purity and integrity of the Hebrew and Greek text. In answer to such allegations and attempts Protestant authors have not only defended the purity of the sacred text in the originals, but have moreover attacked the Latin Vulgate, and have proved that it has no well grounded pretension either to purity or accuracy, and that in regard to the Old Testament more particularly it is but an indifferent translation of a translation, viz., the Greek Septuagint.

There are some circumstances which render the extravagant claims put forth by the Church of Rome on behalf of the Latin Vulgate peculiarly ridiculous. At the time when the Council of

¹ Simon's *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament*, p. 302.

Trent declared the Latin Vulgate to be authentic, and forbade any to reject it upon any pretence, the text of that version was notoriously in a very corrupt and confused state, and the council gave directions for preparing an accurate and authentic edition of it. Nothing, however, was done with this view till nearly thirty years after the council was dissolved, when the matter was taken up in earnest by Pope Sixtus V. He took great pains to prepare a correct text of the Latin Vulgate, revised every sheet himself, and published it in 1598, with a bull prefixed to it, in which he decreed that "this was to be held as the only authentic edition of the Vulgate;" that it "was to be received as true, lawfully authentic, and undoubted;" and that no one should ever after publish any edition varying in any respect from this, under the penalty of incurring "the wrath of Almighty God and of his blessed apostles Peter and Paul." And yet, notwithstanding this prohibition, Pope Clement VIII. in two years after published another edition, virtually superseding that of Sixtus, and varying from it in no less than two thousand passages. A full account of this whole matter, and a table of all the variations, was given in a curious work published in 1600, entitled *Bellum Papale*, by James, keeper of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and re-published a few years ago. The leading facts and documents connected with this matter are also given in a work of prodigious learning by Dr Hodge, entitled *De Bibliorum textibus originalibus, versionibus Græcis, et Latina vulgata*. Hodge's work contains also, especially in Book III., the fullest information on all general matters connected with the sacred text in the original, and in the Greek and Latin versions, and a most elaborate vindication of the position we have been considering, viz., that the original text in Hebrew and Greek is the ultimate standard of appeal in all controversies of religion.

If it is to the sacred text in the original languages that the ultimate appeal lies in all discussions that may arise, as to what really is the will of God revealed for our guidance and salvation, then it is plainly the duty of all who aspire to be the religious guides and instructors of others to be capable of making this appeal, or of following any one who may challenge them to that tribunal. "The people of God everywhere have right unto and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded in the fear of God to

search them, and therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation into which they come ;” and these translations, if in the main faithfully and correctly executed, will be, as they have often been, blessed by God for leading men, who know no language but their own, to the knowledge and belief of the truth, and conducting them in safety to his own presence. Many who have had only translations of the Bible have, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, attained to hope—a hope which has never made them ashamed. But this affords no reason why all, as they may have opportunity, and especially all who have devoted their lives to the instruction of others and the maintenance of the truth and cause of Christ, should not acquire such a knowledge of the original as to enable them to read and understand it, and to judge of the attempts of others to explain and illustrate it. I have already, at an earlier period of the session, enforced upon you the duty of acquiring such a familiarity with the Hebrew and Greek languages as may enable you to read the Scriptures in the original with ease and pleasure. I trust that amid your other labours for the last few months, you have been doing something for the attainment of this important object, and can already bear some testimony to the advantage and the enjoyment attending it. I think, however, the right ground on which this matter should be put and enforced, is not so much that it is both profitable and pleasant to be familiar with the word of God in the original languages, although that is undoubtedly true, but rather that it is the imperative duty of all to acquire as thorough a knowledge of the written word as their circumstances reasonably admit of; that this duty is specially incumbent upon those who aspire to be the instructors of others and the defenders of the truth; that you all have opportunities of being able to read the Scriptures in the original, an important means of knowing them more thoroughly than is otherwise practicable, and that to neglect these opportunities, and thereby fail in attaining the object, indicates an improper and sinful state of mind, and involves a manifest dereliction of an imperative obligation.

LECTURE XLIV.

VARIOUS READINGS.

IN discussing the subject of the integrity and purity of the sacred text in the original languages, we explained to you the sense in which its asserted purity was to be understood, and the limitations with which it was to be received; and we pointed out to you the sources from which our knowledge of the exact text of God's word is to be derived. Though it is owing, as the Confession says, to the singular care and providence of God that the church has always had, and that we still have, his word in the original languages in purity and integrity, yet this care was not miraculously exercised in the way of securing the precise and rigid accuracy of the copies which were taken of the autographs of the inspired authors, and by means of which the books of Scripture have come down to us. The transcription and circulation of the copies of the sacred Scriptures in early times was left to the operation of ordinary means and influences; and the consequence is, that while we have the sacred text in the original languages in a state of what may with perfect propriety be called purity and integrity, we cannot always and in every instance be certain that we have the precise words of the authors. There is no ground to suspect that any passage which ever formed a part of the books which compose the New Testament has perished, and is not now to be found. But, as we shewed you in last lecture, there are a few passages commonly found in the editions of the Greek Testament, and embodied in most of the translations of it into modern languages, whose claim to a place in the sacred text is attended with some degree of doubt; in other words, in regard to which there are some materials derived from the ordinary legitimate sources applicable to the subject, which,

taken by themselves, seem to shew that the passages referred to should not stand in the sacred text, although in many cases they are counterbalanced by a preponderance of equally satisfactory materials derived from the same sources in support of their claim. To most of these passages (all of them indeed extending to the length of a verse), we briefly adverted in last lecture, and shewed you that the facts concerning them implied nothing whatever inconsistent with the substantial purity and integrity of the sacred text. There is, however, another subject connected with this matter to which it is necessary to advert, that, viz., of various readings. There are a considerable number of passages in the New Testament, for to it we mean to confine our observations, in regard to which we have one or more different forms suggested by MSS., ancient versions, and statements of early writers as to how the text should stand, and we must of course decide by comparing the evidence for each reading which of them was most probably that which proceeded from the author. Many men have laboured with the utmost zeal and industry to collect from every source the various readings of the New Testament, and they have now been swelled up, I believe, to about the number of 150,000. This seems somewhat formidable and alarming when stated thus generally, but when you draw near and examine the true state of the case, it sinks into significance. The MSS. of the New Testament are greatly more numerous than those of any other ancient author whatever, and every jot or tittle, even to a single letter, in which any one of them differs from the rest, has been carefully noted and put down as a various reading. Of course a *vast* proportion of what are called various readings are mere errata, oversights in transcription, which at once occur in their true character to every one who reads them, and are at once and without any hesitation traced to their true source in the natural and ordinary oversights incident to transcription, without being supposed to afford a shadow of proof or even of presumption that they existed in the MS. from which the one under consideration may have been copied, not to speak of the autograph or original. This consideration at once disposes of a vast proportion of the variations in the MSS. of the New Testament, which have been put down as various readings. Nothing ought to be considered as being, properly speaking, a various

reading, which is a mere erratum or oversight in the transcription, nothing but what is of such a character and so circumstanced as that it may possibly or probably have formed part of the MS. of the author, or in regard to which we are not entitled positively to aver that it was a mere oversight in the transcription. Every additional MS. that has been discovered and collated has of course greatly increased the number of various readings, just because all the errata which that particular MS. happened to contain were at once added to the list already existing.

When Mill published his edition of the Greek Testament in the early part of last century, the number of various readings was computed to be about 30,000. By the discovery and collation of additional MSS., they have been swelled to above five times as many; but we have scarcely any more various readings, properly so called, than we had then, and the accuracy and certainty of the text have been increased instead of being diminished. When Mill's edition of the Greek Testament was first published, with its vast array of various readings, some of the friends of religion were alarmed at the uncertainty which this fact seemed to attach to the purity and integrity of the sacred text, and infidels were disposed to triumph, as if it afforded an argument in support of their cause. It was shewn, however, especially by Bentley, in his celebrated *Remarks on Collins's Discourse on Freethinking*—first, that when such variations as those which formed a vast proportion of what was exhibited in Mill were reckoned various readings, the number must be greatly increased by every addition to the number of MSS. discovered and collated; second, that the accuracy with which we can set forth the text of any ancient author, and the certainty that we have in the main what he really wrote, is usually in proportion to the number of MSS. of his works which have come down to us, and therefore *by the former proposition, is in proportion to the number of various readings*; and third, that in consequence of the great number of MSS. which have come down to us, we have a much more accurate and a much more thoroughly established text of the New Testament than we have of any of the Greek or Roman classics. These considerations are quite sufficient to prove that the number of what are called various readings affords no ground whatever for an infidel triumph, and to quiet the alarms of the friends of revelation. Still there is

a considerable number of what may be fairly called various readings, *i.e.* variations which cannot at once be set aside as having manifestly been mere errata or errors in transcription, and in regard to which there is some evidence, however slight, tending to shew, if not counterbalanced or contradicted, that they formed part of the original text. But these too when examined are seen to be of scarcely any importance as affecting the purity and integrity of the sacred Scriptures. There are two things that must combine to make a various reading at all important—first, it must be such that the sense or meaning of the passage is materially affected, according as you adopt the one reading or the other; and second, that the critical evidence bearing upon the point be such that there is really ground for serious and honest doubt which of two readings ought to stand as part of the text. If the sense is not materially affected by the adoption of one reading in preference to the other, or if the evidence in favour of one of the readings so decidedly preponderates as to leave little room for reasonable doubt as to which ought to be preferred, then the case may be dismissed as one of no practical importance whatever. A great number of various readings may be at once set aside as utterly insignificant, on the ground of their wanting one or other of these requisites. Either the sense of the passage is not really or sensibly changed by substituting the one for the other, or else the one has a clear and decided preponderance of evidence in its favour. Such various readings need not give us any anxiety or concern. They do not affect in any degree the standard of our faith and practice. They do not impair the purity or integrity of the sacred text. By those two processes—first, of distinguishing between various readings properly so called, and mere errata; and second, of putting aside all those various readings which do not sensibly affect the sense, or which are not based upon critical evidence sufficient to occasion any serious doubt as to their right to a place in the text; the number of various readings is reduced to very few indeed. And in regard to the few that remain, for they are but few, we have abundant grounds for maintaining this proposition, that whichever reading may be adopted, there is not one point of faith or practice, not one doctrine or precept of Scripture, that would be materially affected. There is no various reading resting upon anything like

plausible evidence, the adoption of which would lay upon men an obligation to believe or do anything which, were it not adopted, would not be obligatory; and there is no doctrine or precept seeming to be taught in Scripture, from the obligation of which any various reading that has respectable critical evidence to support it, would exempt us. Some of the chief of the various readings which affect the sense, and in regard to which there is some fair ground for doubting which reading ought to be received into the text, are connected with the doctrine of the Trinity. And we may briefly refer to them as not only not contradicting, but decidedly confirming the important practical position just stated. In adverting in last lecture to 1 John v. 7, or what is commonly called the three heavenly witnesses, we said that there was a decided preponderance of critical evidence against the genuineness of the verse, and that therefore it ought to be held that it did not originally form a part of the sacred text. There are two passages bearing upon this subject, at least upon the divinity of our Saviour, in which the Socinians have laboured to shew that a different reading from that which is found in the common editions of the Greek Testament ought to be adopted. They are Acts xx. 28, and 1 Timothy iii. 16. In regard to the first, the question is, whether the text should read as it is in our version, and in the common editions of the Greek Testament, "To feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood," or to feed the church of the *Lord*, *i.e.* whether $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ or $\Κυ\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon$ should stand in the text in the original. There are other slight variations in the reading suggested by some MSS., but they are not supported by much evidence, and my present object does not require me to advert to them. There can be no reasonable doubt that there is fair ground for an honest difference of opinion as to whether $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ or $\Κυ\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon$ should stand here as part of the original text, and that no man, whatever opinion he may form as to the side on which the evidence preponderates, is entitled to speak very dogmatically upon the subject. All the enemies of the divinity of Christ contend that the genuine reading is $\Κυ\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon$, and not $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$; and some friends of the doctrine have thought that the preponderance of critical evidence is in favour of that reading.

But the only point to which we wish at present to point your attention is, that even if $\Κυ\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon$ were admitted to be the genuine

reading, the whole practical result would be that one of the passages where the word Θεός is applied to Christ would be withdrawn from the Scripture proofs of his divinity, while there would still remain abundant proof in many other passages that he was God over all blessed for evermore. In like manner, in regard to the passage in the third chapter of First Timothy, there are three different readings proposed, all of which have some critical authority to support them. It stands in what is commonly called the *textus receptus* Θεός ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί, and in our version, God was manifest in the flesh. There is some critical authority for reading instead of Θεός the masculine pronoun ὁς, and there is also some for reading ὁ in the neuter. Socinians of course all reject Θεός, and read ὁς or ὁ. We think there is a more decided preponderance of critical evidence in favour of Θεός in this passage than can be alleged in favour of Θεός in the 20th of the Acts, and it has also been plausibly contended that even with the other readings ὁς or ὁ a testimony may be brought out of this passage in favour of our Saviour's divinity. But what we call upon you at present to notice is this, that even if the reading Θεός should be rejected, and if it should farther be admitted that the rejection of Θεός deprives this passage of all force as a proof of our Lord's divinity, that great doctrine would still stand untouched, fully established by many passages of Scripture where there is no various reading which has any plausible evidence to support it, and where there can be but one interpretation fairly put upon the words. In consequence of the strong grounds which they are able to adduce in favour of the spuriousness of the heavenly witnesses, and the plausible though insufficient grounds they can bring forward for the exclusion of Θεός from these two passages, Socinians have generally been much disposed to dabble in various readings, and to boast of the advantage which their cause gains from the adoption of a purer text than the *textus receptus*. But though we were to concede to them all that they demand in this matter—or rather were we to adopt all the changes they propose, which have plausible though insufficient evidence in their favour, for they have proposed various readings in some of the proof passages of the divinity of Christ which have not even plausible critical evidence to support them—nothing whatever would be done in the way of disproving the doctrine of the Trinity; and though one or two of the proof passages might be taken away,

there would still remain abundant scriptural proof that the apostle and high priest of our profession is a partaker of the divine nature, and equal to the Father in power and glory. The Socinians boast much of the concurrence of Griesbach, not only in the omission of the three heavenly witnesses, but also in the substitution of $\kappa\upsilon\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ and $\delta\varsigma$ for $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ in the two passages to which we have now adverted ; and it may be proper in passing to mention with reference to this point—first, that Scholz, the latest editor of a critical edition of the New Testament, who collected a considerable amount of critical apparatus beyond what Griesbach possessed, has retained $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ in both these passages as best supported by critical evidence ; second, that it has been proved by Dr Lawrence, the late Archbishop of Cashel, in his *Remarks on Griesbach's Systematical Classification of MSS.*, that in rejecting $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ in 1 Tim. iii. 16 Griesbach has not accurately followed out and applied even his own critical principles and rules ; and third, what brings us back to the point from which we have referred to this subject, that Griesbach has solemnly declared that notwithstanding his adopting what may be called the Socinian reading of these passages, he firmly believed in the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, as established by conclusive scriptural testimony.¹

We have referred to this matter simply as an illustration of the general position that there are no various readings resting upon anything like fair or plausible critical evidence, which, whatever decision might be adopted regarding them, would change any one doctrine or precept of Scripture. The doctrine of the Trinity has been supposed to be more involved in this question of various readings than any other, and yet you see that the adoption of all the Socinian readings, as they may be called, which have any plausible evidence to rest upon, would leave the main foundations of that great doctrine untouched,

If these general observations upon the question of various readings are well founded, they prove that this whole subject, so far as

¹ “Quare ut iniquas suspiciones omnes, quantum in me est, amoliar, et hominibus malevolis calumniandi ansam præripiam, primum publice profiteor atque Deum testor neutiquam me de veritate istius dogmatis dubitare. Atque sunt profecto tum multa et luculenta argumenta et Scripturæ loca quibus vera Deitas Christi vindicatur, ut ego quidem intelligere vix possim quomodo, concessa Scripturæ sacræ Divina auctoritate, et admissis justis interpretandi regulis, dogma hoc in dubium a quopiam vocari possit” (Lawrence's *Remarks*, p. 384).

it affects, or is supposed to affect, the general purity or integrity of the sacred text, the fitness of the Bible as it has come down to us to convey to us accurately and certainly the whole counsel of God, is destitute of any real practical importance.

At the same time it should be remarked that the investigation of the true and correct text of Scripture is a branch of theological study that should not be altogether neglected. It is right that all ministers should know something of the grounds on which the accuracy of the received text of Scripture rests, of the evidence that bears upon the settlement of the true reading in some of the most important passages where it has been a subject of controversial discussion, and generally of the principles and rules applicable to this matter. This subject has been very fully cultivated for the last seventy or eighty years, especially in Germany, and has been held forth very much in the aspect of an independent and important science, under the name of biblical criticism. For criticism in the modern restricted use of the word does not include the interpretation of Scripture, or the investigation of the sense and meaning of its statements; (that is called hermeneutics or exegesis), but merely the settlement of the text, the decision of all questions about the reading for the purpose of exhibiting the sacred text as nearly as possible as it came from the hands of its original authors. The practical importance of biblical criticism in this restricted sense has been greatly overrated.¹ Still it is undoubtedly the duty of every one who aspires to be an instructor of others to attain to as much knowledge and certainty as his circumstances fairly admit of, in regard to what really is the word of God, as it came from the hands of its inspired authors, and to be able to give some account, when called upon, of the grounds on which his belief and practice in this respect rest. The general acquaintance with the materials of evidence, with the right modes of using and applying them, and with the results to which they lead, that may be necessary for securing these ends, it is certainly incumbent upon you to possess. The materials for determining upon what is the true and real text of Scripture are, as we formerly explained, MSS., ancient versions, and quotations from Scripture in ancient writers, and declarations or indications by them as to what existed

¹ See Marsh's *Lectures*, part ii. lect. i. pp. 264, 265.

in the MSS. then in use. The MSS. that have come down to us are the most direct and important source of evidence. And the others are valuable, mainly, if not solely, in so far as they afford proofs or presumptions of what was found in some MSS. at the time they were made. Now, if this be so, it is necessary that you acquire some knowledge of the MSS. and ancient versions, and it is the more important to acquire some knowledge of the ancient versions as they afford assistance, not only in criticism or the settlement of the text, but also in the much more important work of interpretation, or the investigation of its meaning. All the MSS. which have been discovered have been carefully examined, and much learned investigation has been directed to the object of ascertaining their age, and other circumstances which may affect their value as witnesses. With the leading results of these investigations you ought to possess some acquaintance. You will soon find that it is not the age of a MS. alone that is considered to affect the question, whether it contain upon the whole a correct text, or is to be regarded as of much weight in determining the authority of various readings, but that other tests have been applied to judge of the authority and value of different MSS. Elaborate and ingenious attempts have been made to classify the existing MSS., *i.e.* to trace them to certain general sources, and rank them all under a few heads. These different classes of MSS. are commonly called recensions, a word corresponding nearly with our word edition, or rather family. Griesbach was the first who proposed a formal classification of the existing MSS. On taking a comprehensive survey of the whole materials bearing upon the settlement of the text of the New Testament, he thought he discovered traces of the existence in early times of three recensions or editions, agreeing of course in substance in the text which they exhibited, but varying somewhat from each other in the particular readings they presented. These he named the Alexandrine recension, the Occidental, and the Constantinopolitan, and he ranked them in point of accuracy in the order in which they have now been mentioned. He then laboured to reduce all the different MSS. and ancient versions under one or other of these three recensions or families, and then proposed to apply them in the way of settling the text of the New Testament, and determining upon the various readings, not individually, but collectively, *i.e.* for

instance, to prefer a reading which had the support of two of these recensions to a reading which was supported only by one of them, whatever might be the number of individual MSS. by which the different readings might be respectively countenanced. It was upon this principle that he prepared his edition of the Greek Testament, the publication of which forms an important era in the history of biblical criticism, and which ought to be possessed and examined by all who wish to investigate thoroughly the text of the New Testament. Subsequent authors have generally adopted Griesbach's leading idea of a classification of MSS. under different recensions or families, but have differed considerably from him and among themselves as to what recensions or families have existed, and can still be traced out, and as to the value that ought to be attached to their testimony. This subject is evidently one of a very intricate kind, and the materials for settling anything concerning it are very vague and uncertain. The general impression among competent judges is, that nothing very certain or definite has yet been attained in regard to this matter. Professor Moses Stuart, in his notes to the American translation of Hug's *Introduction*, says, "On this subject (the classification of MSS.) the reader should be apprised that discussion is by no means at an end, and that after all the ingenuity, labour, and learning that have been exhibited, no real *terra firma* on which we can plant our feet has yet been taken possession of, or even fully discovered."

We must still then, in the meantime, continue in our investigation of this subject to form the best estimate we can of the value or authority of different MSS. and versions individually, and of the influence they ought to have in determining the true state of the text, and in deciding upon the various readings; and various rules have been laid down by different authors for regulating our procedure in this matter without any regard to an attempted classification. From the vast amount of labour and learning which have been brought to bear upon the history of MSS. individually, and the classification of them collectively, professedly for the purpose of obtaining authentic materials for the formation of a pure and correct text, you might be led to suppose that very important results depended upon the decision of these questions. This, however, is a mistake. Notwithstanding all the labour that has been expended in collecting and collating MSS., in classifying

them and estimating their value, and in laying down rules to regulate the application of them, the fact undoubtedly is, that all the MSS. which have come down to us exhibit a text of which purity and integrity may be fairly predicated, and set before us plainly and unequivocally all the doctrines and duties which from any source, or upon any ground, we have reason to believe that God embodied in his word. No minister ought to be so ignorant as to be entirely at the mercy of another in regard to anything that bears even remotely and partially upon the great object of knowing and ascertaining exactly what God has revealed, and therefore every minister ought to know something of the materials for settling the text and deciding upon various readings, and of the way and manner in which they have been and should be applied. There is one department of this subject which is usually discussed under the head of the history of the text, and with which you ought to possess some acquaintance. It may be said to be occupied practically with the investigation of these questions, what is the origin and what is the value of that text of the Greek Testament which has been in most general use since the invention of printing, and from which most of the translations of the New Testament into modern languages have been made, and whether there be any other text which is upon the whole preferable to it. The investigation of this subject has produced much interesting information as to the sources from which the first printed editions of the Greek Testament were derived, the number and value of the MSS. so far as they can be ascertained, which were employed by the original editors, the different editions professing to rest upon critical foundations, which have since been published, the additional light that has been cast upon the state of the text, and the decision of the litigated questions about particular various readings applied, with the view of settling as the practical result of all, what is upon the whole the best and purest text of the Greek Testament that is now accessible. The text that long prevailed in Europe, and from which most of the existing translations were made, commonly known as the *textus receptus*, is based chiefly upon editions published by Stephens and Beza from MSS., and very closely resembling each other. This continued to be in general use, though the correctness of some of its readings had been doubted and questioned, till the publication of Griesbach's New Testament, of which, in the second or complete

edition of it, the first volume was published in 1796 and the second in 1806. Griesbach laboured to shew that the *textus receptus* had been derived from a very small number of MSS., and these of no great antiquity or value, and that now there were materials for producing a decidedly purer and more correct text. Most of the editions of the Greek Testament which have since been published in this country or upon the Continent have been based mainly upon Griesbach's, or at least have in some form or other exhibited the principal of his various readings. Most of those who have examined this subject with attention have been of opinion that, upon the whole, Griesbach's text is more pure and correct, approaches nearer to the original text of the inspired authors than the *textus receptus*, and I am disposed to think that this opinion is correct. At the same time I do not know anything which is better fitted to give a distinct and vivid impression of the substantial identity of all MSS. of the New Testament, of the extremely narrow range within which the investigation of the various readings from the application of all existing materials lies, and of the insignificance of the results which have been derived from the researches of critics as distinguished from interpreters, than just to run the eye over the inner margin of Griesbach's New Testament. There you have at one view all the words and phrases which he has removed from the *textus receptus* to make room for his own emendations, and you cannot fail to be struck with their utter insignificance, both in number and importance. And you will thus be very decidedly confirmed in your convictions of the purity and integrity of the text of the New Testament. And while it may be admitted that upon the whole and in general Griesbach's text is preferable to the *textus receptus*, this does not hold in the case of each particular reading with respect to which they differ. There are several cases, and these of considerable comparative importance, as for example, the two passages to which we referred in the preceding part of this lecture, in which Scholz, the author of the latest critical edition of the New Testament, prefers, and apparently upon satisfactory grounds, the reading of the *textus receptus*, and of our common version, to that which Griesbach has substituted. It should be remarked too that the opinion of the superiority of the text of Griesbach to the *textus receptus* has not been universally adopted, and that an ingenious and learned defence of the received text, including even a vindica-

tion of the genuineness of the three heavenly witnesses, is to be found in Nolan's *Inquiry into the Integrity of the Greek Vulgate ; Prolegomena to Critical Editions*—Mill, Wetstein, Griesbach, Scholz ; *Introductions*, especially Michaelis, and 2d vol. of Horne, Franck, and Davidson.

I do not think it necessary to dwell longer upon this subject of the original text and the various readings, or what is now usually comprehended under the designation of biblical criticism, in its more restricted sense, as distinguished from interpretation. We have briefly explained to you the general nature of the subject, the points to be attended to in studying it, and the materials to be employed in the investigation. We have shewn you that the subject is not one of very great practical importance, so far as concerns the actual discovery of the mind and will of God from his word, while we have also adverted to the reasons which make it necessary and imperative that ministers should acquire some knowledge of the leading points involved in it. All the knowledge that is necessary upon this subject can be easily acquired. It is to be found most readily in the *Prolegomena* to the principal critical editions of the Greek Testament, especially Mill's, Wetstein's, Griesbach's, Scholz's, Lachmann's, and Tischendorf's, and in the works usually called *Introductions*, especially Michaelis's, Hug's, and the second volume of Horne. Gerard's *Institutes of Biblical Criticism* is a useful book, but he uses the word "criticism" in a wider sense than that in which it is now generally employed, as comprehending the investigation both of the readings and the sense. But though the book comprehends both, they are treated separately, as he is careful to distinguish between what he calls (p. 237) corrective or emendatory criticism, which is employed in determining the genuine reading, and explanatory or interpretative criticism, employed in discovering the true sense. There is a very able and interesting view of the history and literature of this subject in the first part of Bishop Marsh's *Lectures upon the Criticism and Interpretation of the Scriptures*. And perhaps a larger amount of useful information upon this whole subject than could be found in any single book, including also notices of the most recent discussions upon these topics on the Continent, and of all the principal works necessary for the investigation of them, is contained in Dr Davidson's *Lectures on Biblical Criticism*.¹

¹ Edinburgh : Clark. 1839.

LECTURE XLV.

NATURE, DIFFICULTIES, AND NECESSITY OF SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES.

AFTER having ascertained that the written word contained in the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is all given by inspiration of God, and is the only rule of faith and practice, and that this rule is to be found in purity and integrity in the books of Scripture as we have them in the original languages, we now proceed to consider the way and manner in which the meaning of these books, which are the only revelation of God's will to men, may be known and established. This forms the subject of what is commonly called exegetical theology or hermeneutics, and it is a department of fundamental importance, inasmuch as the correct interpretation of Scripture is the basis of all sound theological knowledge. I can only give you a brief notice of the leading general considerations that ought to be kept in view in the critical study of the Scriptures, in order that you may be preserved from error, and guided into a right knowledge of their meaning. And it will be proper, in the first place, to attend to the true nature and character of the object to be aimed at. The general object aimed at is just to ascertain and to bring out the true and correct meaning of every statement contained in the sacred Scriptures; in other words, so to use them as that they may really serve to us the purpose which they were intended to accomplish, by conveying to us fully and accurately, because we interpret them aright, the mind and will of God as to everything that we are to believe and to do. The importance of this object is abundantly evident, and the great variety of interpretations put upon the statements of Scripture, even in matters of importance, would seem to shew that in some sense and in some respects it is

not altogether free from difficulty. It is a great Protestant principle to maintain in opposition to Romanists. We have already had occasion to bring before you the evidence of the perspicuity of Scripture in all necessary things. But even in necessary things all who profess to receive the Scriptures as a divine revelation are far from being of one mind; in other words, they put different interpretations upon scriptural statements. The Socinians, for example, cannot find in Scripture any statements which declare or imply the doctrine of the divinity or atonement of Christ, and interpret differently, or assign a different meaning to those passages which the orthodox churches of Christ regard as plainly teaching these fundamental truths. This we do not regard as affording any evidence of the obscurity of Scripture in these matters, for we cannot but believe, notwithstanding the Socinian denial of them, that they are clearly revealed; and we think the Socinians give very clear indications of a decided aversion to these truths—of a determination practically to judge of them by another standard, and to refuse to receive them, however clearly they might be stated. It is no doubt true however that obscurity does attach to the Scriptures, and that while they are clear in all necessary or fundamental points, both of doctrine and duty, there are many passages in them the precise meaning of which it is not easy to discover, and some the true meaning of which may not after all our investigations be very thoroughly settled, so that we can be very confident that we have attained it. All this is certainly true, and it ought to be clearly seen and explicitly admitted. It illustrates at once the importance and the difficulty of this subject. The general object of hermeneutics is to point out the ways and the means by which we may attain to the most accurate, the most extensive, and the most certain knowledge of the whole statements contained in the sacred Scriptures. It is the imperative duty of every one to whom God has communicated a written revelation of his will to acquire as full and accurate a knowledge of the meaning of all its statements as his means and opportunities admit of. And this duty is of course peculiarly obligatory upon all who aspire to be the religious instructors of others. So long as there are statements in God's word, the meaning of which we do not fully comprehend, it is our duty to continue to investigate it; and even after we may think that we have correctly apprehended the meaning of its

statements, we will still find abundant scope for tracing their harmonies and developing their full import and applications. We fear that a much greater ignorance of the true meaning of scriptural statements prevails than is commonly supposed, and we are persuaded that the attainment of a correct knowledge of the precise meaning of God's word is more difficult, and requires a greater amount of study and labour than is usually imagined. We do not refer of course to those portions of Scripture which more directly and immediately set forth the fundamental doctrines and duties which it was the great leading object of God's word to teach, anything which is necessary to salvation, and which is therefore certainly known by all, however humble and scanty in other respects their attainments, who enjoy the illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit, and have been led by him into the way of life. But beyond these things in Scripture, which are clearly revealed because necessary for salvation, and many other matters of a historical and biographical kind, which are quite clear, though the knowledge of them is not necessary to salvation, there are many statements in Scripture not so clear as those contained in these two classes of passages, about the true meaning of which men are much more ignorant than they themselves suppose.

We acquire generally a considerable familiarity with the words of Scripture, and this too often serves as a substitute for a knowledge of their meaning. We think that we know the meaning of a passage because we have acquired an inveterate familiarity with the words in which it is expressed, while we have never bestowed upon it that degree of attention and examination, of reflection or meditation, which is necessary to enable us to form a distinct conception of its import. We fear it is no uncommon thing for men to read the Scriptures without being at much pains to understand them, resting satisfied with very obscure and misty conceptions of the meaning of their statements; this want of clear and definite views of their import being concealed even from themselves by their familiarity with their sound. The only way by which men's ignorance of the real meaning of many scriptural statements, their want of clear and definite conceptions of their import, is likely to be tested and discovered, is by their attempting to embody in words of their own the views they may entertain of particular passages. This process, steadily and faithfully pursued, would, we believe, open up to men an amount of real ignorance of the

meaning of scriptural statements, or a want of clear and definite ideas as to their import, of which they were previously little aware. It is a very common thing even for ministers, when they are called upon in the discharge of their public duties, to open up the meaning of scriptural statements, and begin to embody their views in words, to find that they had no such knowledge of the meaning of the particular passage to which their attention may have been directed, as from their familiarity with the words in which it is expressed, they had been led to suppose ; and to discover that some research and reflection are necessary before they get a clear and definite idea of its import, and are able to bring out its meaning clearly and precisely for the instruction and edification of others. An incident illustrative of this once occurred to me, which I may mention, because I think it fitted to be useful, though it certainly affords no materials for self-complacency. Being called upon to preach a sermon for a particular occasion, I selected a text which, from the sound of it, seemed to be suitable. I then proceeded to investigate more carefully the precise meaning of the text, and became convinced that its import was not what I had supposed it to be ; that in its true and proper meaning as it stood in the Bible, it was not suitable to the occasion, and could not be applied to it without straining or perversion, and accordingly I laid it aside and selected another. But what makes the case somewhat more remarkable is, that several years afterwards, upon a similar occasion, I again thought of this same text. I had quite forgotten my former investigation of its meaning, and the result of it. I commenced the investigation anew, and very soon came to the same conclusion as before, and again laid it aside. I have no doubt that incidents of a similar kind have occurred in the experience of many ministers, and they are well fitted to illustrate the position which I am anxious to enforce upon you, that there prevails a great deal of discreditable ignorance of the precise meaning of the statements of God's word, and a great proneness to rest contented with very obscure and defective notions of their real import. If I had been able to give as much time as I at one time expected to the subject of the interpretation of Scripture, I would have made it an object to have convinced you by actual experiment that there are many passages in the New Testament which you imagine that you understand, because you are familiar with the words in which they are expressed, to which yet you attach no very distinct and

definite meaning, and the import of which you could not very well explain if called upon to do so, without taking some time for investigation and reflection. But you can make the experiment yourselves, and I would strongly urge you to do so, *i.e.* to select some passages of the New Testament, and then to state in words to yourselves, or to one another, the meaning you attach to them, and to explain distinctly the way in which they are connected with the preceding and succeeding contexts. By this process you would first of all be convinced that you understand less of the meaning of Scripture than you had supposed; and then second, you would gain much of the knowledge which you previously wanted; you would both be convinced of your ignorance, and you would also to a large extent have this ignorance removed. If so much ignorance of the true and exact meaning of Scripture prevail, if such vague and indefinite conceptions often obtain in regard to their meaning and import, it must be either because far too little attention is given to the study of the Scriptures, or because there are great difficulties in the way of clearly and precisely ascertaining their meaning, or because both these statements are true. That far too little attention is given to the careful and exact study of the Scriptures is very manifest, and it is also true, in a certain sense, and with some limitations, that there are considerable difficulties to be overcome in attaining to definite and accurate conceptions of the import of many of their statements. Just reflect upon what is fairly implied in searching the Scriptures—a duty expressly enjoined by our Saviour, and therefore imperatively incumbent upon all who have the word of God in their hands—and view it even abstracted from any difficulties connected with the languages in which they are written. What does this duty of searching the Scriptures involve, even in regard to those who can read them only in a translation? All this study and attention are necessary even to understand a translation of the Scriptures in our own language. And although reading and studying the Scriptures in the original affords some important facilities for understanding them, which no translation can fully supply to those who are fully competent to use the original aright, yet this advantage can be secured only by much previous labour and exertion. There are difficulties connected with the interpretation of all ancient books written in languages which are now no longer in general use, and have reference to topics with some of which we are but imperfectly acquainted;

and these difficulties attach to the study of the Bible, as well as to other books which are in these respects similar. It is to a large extent true that the Bible must be studied, and its meaning must be ascertained, in substantially the same way as other books.

There are indeed most important peculiarities attaching to the Bible, which should affect not merely the Spirit in which we study it, and the application we make of its meaning when ascertained, but even in some respects the mode of interpreting and explaining it, especially of course the necessity of the special influence of the Holy Spirit, to enable us to understand it aright, and its entire freedom from error, as being all given by inspiration of God. But this does not essentially affect the position that its meaning must be ascertained in substantially the same way as that of other books. The Holy Spirit makes known to us nothing but what is actually contained in and fairly deducible from the words of Scripture correctly and critically understood. And the inspiration of the Scriptures, the certainty which this doctrine affords that all their statements came from God, should lead men to be utterly unconcerned about anything but just ascertaining their true and real meaning, and make them at all times quite willing to prosecute the strictest investigation into their precise import. And we are thus thrown back upon, and cannot at all escape from, the difficulties attaching to the interpretation of a series of works such as in point of language and general character are those which compose the Bible. It is right that you should be aware of your own ignorance of the precise meaning of scriptural statements, of your want of clear and definite conceptions as to their import; and it is right that you should be impressed with a sense of the importance, and in some respects the difficulty, of fully and accurately understanding their meaning. But at the same time you must not lose sight of the great doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture in all necessary things, as held by the Protestant churches in opposition to Romanists. The truth is, that when we come to consider the critical interpretation of Scripture as an important and difficult subject of investigation, we virtually lay out of view those great fundamental truths so plainly revealed in Scripture, on the knowledge and belief of which men's salvation depends. They are taught so plainly that he that runneth may read. And yet, plain as they are, they are never really understood, except by the enlightening influence of the

Holy Spirit; while it is also true that on all whom his gracious influences are exerted are led clearly to understand, and firmly to believe them. The use and application of an accurate knowledge and a critical study of the Scriptures, so far as these great truths are concerned, is not so much to discover or to find them out, but rather to settle accurately what are the particular passages of Scripture, which most certainly and conclusively establish them, and to vindicate the true meaning of these passages against the misinterpretations of adversaries. For these purposes a knowledge of the principles of the critical interpretation of Scripture is necessary, though the truths themselves are clearly seen by many who have no knowledge of the principles of hermeneutics, and are utterly unable to make any use of its resources. But independently altogether of what is necessary to men's salvation, and of the way in which this saving knowledge of necessary things is obtained, it is men's duty to acquire as accurate and extensive a knowledge as possible of all that is contained in the word of God, to study for themselves, and to ascertain, as clearly and as certainly as they can, the true meaning of many passages, about the import and bearing of which there are differences of opinion among men who are not only possessed of all the ordinary natural and acquired capacities for understanding the true meaning of Scripture, but who have been guided by the Spirit into all necessary and fundamental truth. No man ought ever to expound any portion of the word of God until he has carefully investigated its meaning, and satisfied himself of its import; and however fully he may understand, and however deeply he may feel and realise the great fundamental doctrines of the gospel, and however able he may be to bring much useful and edifying matter out of the Scriptures well adapted for practical instruction, his opinion certainly will not be entitled to much weight, and he will be very liable to fall into error in regard to the precise meaning of many of the statements of Scripture, unless he has given some considerable attention to the critical study of the Bible, unless he is well acquainted with the principles and the materials of hermeneutics, and has acquired some skill and experience in applying them.¹

¹ Ernesti on "The Difficulty of Interpreting the New Testament" in his *Opuscula Philologica Critica*.

LECTURE XLVI.

AGENCY OF THE SPIRIT—PRAYER.

WE have explained to you the general nature of hermeneutics as a department of theology, and the objects to which it is directed. We have likewise illustrated its necessity and importance, as based not only upon the character of the objects aimed at, but upon the general prevailing ignorance of the precise and exact meaning of scriptural statements. We directed your attention to what may be in some sense called the peculiar position in this respect of those things in Scripture which are necessary to be known, believed, and practised for salvation, as being so clearly revealed as scarcely to require any investigation for ascertaining their meaning, and as being certainly taught by the Spirit to all who enjoy his guidance; while yet, clearly as they are revealed, they are never fully understood or seen in their true light until the Holy Spirit open men's eyes and shine into their hearts. In explaining the general principles of hermeneutics, or of the interpretation of Scripture, it is usual for men to confine their attention simply to the object of ascertaining and explaining the meaning of the statements of Scripture, or understanding them so as to be able to state their import correctly in propositions, without taking into account the difference between a merely intellectual perception of their import and that view or sense of them alone deserving of the name of knowledge, which actually produces upon the heart and character of men the practical effects which the word was intended to produce, and the production of which is essential to their salvation. This knowledge of the Scriptures which effects important practical changes upon men's characters and lives is produced only by the effectual operation of the Spirit of truth. And it is only when his almighty influence is exerted that men are enabled to see and to realise the great objects which the word

of God was intended to unfold. In so far as the knowledge of the meaning of God's word, or the perception of divine truth, is produced by the Holy Spirit, the result is not subject to human laws or rules, and on this ground the topic is not usually discussed in books upon the science of interpretation, which is directed to the object of unfolding the principles and rules by the observance and practice of which men may attain to a correct knowledge of the meaning of Scripture. But when the question is put upon its proper footing, when it is stated as it ought to be stated, How are we to know certainly and correctly the mind and will of God as revealed in his word? then it is plain that every element which really bears upon a full and comprehensive answer to the question ought to be taken into account, and to have its due place and influence assigned to it; and it is certainly a doctrine clearly revealed in Scripture, that in order to men's acquiring a real knowledge of God's will from his word, the influence of the Holy Spirit is necessary. Not only is it true that no man is turned from darkness to light except by the special agency of the Holy Spirit, that no man without this is ever led to know to any practical or saving result even the clearest and most fundamental truths of Scripture, and that all real effective knowledge of any portion of God's word is to be ascribed to his agency;—although this is quite sufficient to establish the indispensable necessity and paramount importance of understanding and recognising his influence—but also moreover that on his enlightening influences depends our real and certain knowledge of any portion of God's word. The object of hermeneutics is to point out in what way and by what means we may most certainly attain to a correct knowledge of all that the word of God contains. And upon the ground of the plain statements of Scripture itself we are bound to regard the agency of the Holy Spirit as an essential element in this matter. The agency of the Holy Spirit is purely a matter of revelation. We can learn nothing about it except from the word of God, and the ideas which we entertain and on which we act regarding it should be derived wholly from that source. This is not the time for entering into a full exposition of the work of the spirit in enlightening the mind and guiding to the knowledge of God's revealed will. An exposition of the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding to the knowledge of the truth forms an important topic

in Christian theology, in the system of scriptural doctrine, and ought to be fully discussed in its proper place. And besides, it could not be fully opened up except in connection with an exposition of the scriptural doctrines with respect to the native and original depravity of man, and especially the darkness of understanding which needs to be removed before any real and effective knowledge of God's revealed will is acquired. We have to do with it at present chiefly as the basis of certain practical considerations to be constantly kept in view and acted upon in the study of God's word. Another great general lesson to be impressed upon you is, that you can gain no real valuable knowledge of the word of God unless the special agency of the Spirit accompany your study of it, that this truth ought to be recognised and acted upon, that it should lead you to cherish a corresponding frame of mind, *i.e.* such a frame of mind as is the rational and appropriate result of the assured belief of it; and to make it your leading object in everything connected with the study of God's word, to act in such a way and to adopt such measures as may tend, in accordance with what God has revealed regarding his ordinary principle of procedure, to secure for you most fully and habitually the presence and operation of his Spirit to guide you into all truth. It may indeed be alleged that since it is admitted that the whole revealed will of God is actually contained in the words and statements of Scripture, and since it is also admitted that the meaning of the words of Scripture is to be investigated and ascertained in substantially the same way, and by the use of the same means as the statements of other books, nothing more is necessary to understand the meaning of Scripture than to understand any other similar ancient work, and that any special agency of the Holy Spirit is superfluous. There is a sense in which there is some truth in this allegation, *i.e.* there is a sense in which a considerable measure of acquaintance with the meaning of the statements of Scripture may be acquired by those who do not enjoy the special guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit. It is true that most commonly those who afford by their opinions, their character, or their conduct, evidence that they have not the guidance and teaching of the Spirit, fail in understanding correctly even those fundamental doctrines which are most clearly revealed. But this is not universally the case.

There have been men who seem to have been, in some sense, honestly persuaded that the leading principles of evangelical doctrine are taught in Scripture, and who, by the use of the ordinary resources of learning and criticism, have defended these principles against the assaults of adversaries, while yet there was reason to fear that they did not enjoy the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit, were in no way practically impressed by those truths which they seemed to believe, and which they may have successfully defended, and were never led to anything like a real knowledge or perception of the objects which these truths unfold. It is not to be denied that even men who do not believe in the divine origin and authority of the Bible may, in the use of the ordinary appropriate means, attain to a considerable measure of correct acquaintance with its statements. Some striking instances of this, as well as some testimonies to the scriptural authority of orthodox doctrines, are to be found in the writings of some of the German rationalists. These men have usually given a great measure of attention to the critical study of the Bible, as of a merely human book, by ordinary human means; and some of them who were most eminently distinguished for their learning and critical acumen have, in the interpretations of particular portions of Scripture, shewn, on purely critical grounds, that the declarations of Paul, for instance, contained plain assertions of the common orthodox or Calvinistic doctrine, that the Calvinistic interpretation was plainly that which, according to the strict rules of exegesis, ought to be put upon the apostle's words; while, at the same time, they have given us distinctly to understand that they could not believe anything so irrational or absurd upon his authority. It is also certain generally that many men who, there is the best reason to believe, did not enjoy the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit, have cast much light upon many of the obscurer passages of Scripture, and have virtually settled or determined the interpretation which has ever since been generally put upon them, even by men who enjoyed the guidance of the Spirit of truth. All this must be admitted as true, and no doctrine inconsistent with it can be received. But there is nothing in all this inconsistent with what we have said about the enlightening agency of the Holy Spirit. The substance of what we contend

for upon this point may be summed up in these two positions—first, that the special enlightening influence of the Spirit is indispensable to the attainment of any real, practical, effective knowledge of God's word—any knowledge of Scripture that is really worthy of the name, or of any value and importance, so far as concerns men's highest, their eternal interests; and second, that the assistance and guidance of the Holy Spirit is to be sought and expected in the investigation into the meaning of every portion of Scripture, and that the actual enjoyment of this guidance and assistance is, though not indispensable to our attaining a correct intellectual conception of the meaning of any scriptural statement, yet the best and the only effectual security for our acquiring an accurate and extensive acquaintance with God's word. The difference between the knowledge which men without the Spirit may gain of the statements of Scripture, and that knowledge which alone is valuable and saving, and for which we must be indebted exclusively to his agency, cannot, perhaps from the nature of the case, be very precisely defined, or very exactly described, except by its effects.¹

The statements of Scripture about the enlightening agency of the Spirit, chiefly respect, no doubt, the communication to men of that knowledge of fundamental and necessary things, which makes them wise unto salvation. But as the whole word of God was inspired by him, and as it is all fitted to bear more or less directly upon the great object of promoting men's growth in knowledge and in holiness, as it effects any part of these objects only so far as it is used as an instrument in his hand, and can have even an instrumental efficacy only in so far as it is correctly understood, we cannot doubt that he is ever ready to aid us in all our humble and honest attempts to understand the meaning of the statements of his word; that his aid must be of paramount importance, and indeed affords the only security that we have correctly apprehended the import of the truths which he inspired. The Scripture clearly warrants these positions; and though it does not give any explicit information about the modes of the Spirit's operation in enlightening the mind and guiding to a knowledge of the meaning of the

¹ I have omitted an extract here, and another a few pages further on, from Owen's ΣΥΝΕΣΙΣ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΗ. The passages will be found in Dr Gould's edition, vol. iv. pp. 156 and 204.—ED.

Bible, yet it tells us enough to be the basis of important practical conclusions as to certain means to be used in conducting our study of it. We have already stated the reasons why we do not mean at present to give any detailed exposition of the great Scripture doctrine concerning the enlightening agency of the Holy Spirit, our object being simply to point out the practical lessons to be deduced from it, as to the way in which the Scriptures ought to be studied. But there are one or two explanatory observations which it may be useful to lay before you. First, then, this enlightening influence of the Spirit in guiding to the knowledge of the meaning of the Sacred Scriptures, is something specifically different from what may be called the ordinary blessing of God upon our efforts in the use of ordinary natural means. All men who admit the existence and moral government of God acknowledge, in some vague and indefinite sense, the necessity of the divine blessing in order to the successful exercise of their faculties, and the due improvement of the ordinary means for the attainment of any end. Socinians, and others who deny the existence of the Holy Ghost as a distinct person, would not hesitate to declare the necessity of the divine blessing, and to express their dependence upon it for attaining to a correct knowledge of the meaning of Scripture. But the enlightening influence of the Spirit is plainly represented to us in the Bible as something distinct from this, and as altogether special and peculiar in its origin and character. We have not indeed materials for explaining very precisely this specialty or peculiarity, as it is described in Scripture chiefly by its results, in a practical knowledge and in saving benefits—results which, we are assured, never proceed from any other source. But it is distinguished from the ordinary blessing of God upon the exercise of our faculties upon the use of means in these respects, besides what we know of the momentous difference of the results, that it is ascribed peculiarly to the third person of the Godhead, that it is represented as the fruit of Christ's purchase, as procured by him, and imparted by him, and that it has special reference to the natural ungodliness of men's hearts, and the natural darkness of their understandings.

Another important truth clearly taught us in Scripture concerning the enlightening agency of the Spirit is, that it does not consist merely in the objective presentation of the truth, but also and principally in a subjective work upon our intellectual and

moral natures. The Spirit does indeed present the truth objectively to our minds. The whole word of God is to be traced to his more immediate agency, and he in some sense uses the truth revealed as his instrument in all his enlightening and saving operations. But the cause of the essential difference between that presentation of the truth by which men's minds have been really enlightened and their hearts savingly impressed, and all previous presentations of it when no such results were exhibited, must, since the truth itself is the same, and the difference of the result is ascribed in Scripture wholly to the agency of the Spirit, be sought in some effect produced by him upon the subject or recipient man, in consequence of which he deals with and is affected by the truth differently from what he had ever done or been before. This general idea, that the enlightening influence of the Spirit is not merely an objective presentation of the truth, but implies also a subjective work in our understandings and our hearts, is evidently sanctioned by the language of Scripture describing it, when it speaks of "opening our eyes, shining into our hearts, giving us light," &c. And the character of his work, we cannot doubt, is substantially the same in the whole of the future process of guiding us into all truth, and opening up to us more fully and in detail the meaning of the inspired word, by delivering us from causes of error, directing and controlling us in the exercise of our faculties, and leading us to right conclusions. But what we have chiefly to do with at present is the consideration of the practical conclusions which this great scriptural doctrine of the agency of the Spirit in guiding us to the meaning of the word of God suggests and impresses, or the practical rules which it requires us to observe in the study of the Bible, in order that we may attain to the fullest and most correct knowledge of God's revealed will. And this may be said to consist generally in acknowledging and honouring the Spirit's agency in the matter, as it is set before us in Scripture, and using those means which we have reason from Scripture to believe bear more immediately upon the object of bringing his agency into operation. We are to acknowledge the agency of the Spirit in inspiring the Scriptures, and in opening up their true meaning; we are to believe the truth upon these points, and to be suitably impressed or affected by it. In studying the Bible and investigating the meaning of its statements, we are to

be ever deeply impressed with the conviction that it is the Spirit's words we are dealing with, and that it is by his special agency alone that we can fully understand them. These are the great features in which the Bible differs from every other book—first, that it was given by inspiration of the Spirit of God ; and second, that he not only produced it, but enlightens us in the knowledge of its meaning. And these truths ought to be ever present to our thoughts, and to be exerting their appropriate influence when we engage in the study of it. The principle that the Bible is to be interpreted and explained in the same way as any other book, has been perhaps most broadly asserted and most strenuously insisted upon by those who have denied its inspiration ; but there is no necessary connection between them. The principle that the Bible is to be interpreted and explained in the same way as any other book is, though it has been much abused, substantially a sound one, and does not necessarily either spring from or lead to a denial of its plenary inspiration. The meaning of the words, clauses, and sentences in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures must be ascertained by the use of the same materials, by the application of the same rules, and the prosecution of the same processes, by which we ascertain the meaning of any other books in dead languages. There is no other way in which we can attain to a correct knowledge of the exact meaning of the statements which the Holy Spirit has dictated and put on record. And, except by acquiring a correct knowledge of the meaning of what is actually said in Scripture, we have no certain means of knowing God's revealed will. A belief in the plenary inspiration of Scripture, far from leading us to reject or lay aside this principle, should only lead us more faithfully and more fearlessly to apply it. We believe that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and therefore we need not be afraid that anything which is really contained in Scripture, correctly and critically understood, will be dishonouring to God, or injurious to us, or inconsistent with any other portion of the sacred record ; and on this account our belief in its inspiration should just lead us to apply the more rigorous and stringent investigation to the discovery of the true actual import of every statement which it contains. But while a belief in the plenary inspiration of Scripture should not preclude, but on the contrary encourage, the fullest application of the ordinary rules to the investigation of the

meaning of the statements, it should constrain us to conduct this investigation at all times under a feeling of deep solemnity, with a single desire to know the true and real meaning of what the Spirit has dictated, and with a determined purpose, and a cordial willingness, to submit our understanding, our heart, and our life, to whatever it shall appear that he has really declared or required. And if we are dependent in any measure or to any extent upon an additional and special agency of the Spirit for understanding aright what he has inspired, then it is indispensable and obligatory upon us that we be aware of this, that we feel and express this dependence. This is a state of mind obviously required ; its absence or deficiency has an evident tendency, according to the ordinary principles of the divine procedure, to prevent our receiving the guidance and assistance of which we stand in need, and its presence and fulness have a tendency directly the reverse. Upon the ground of this truth we are more immediately called upon to inquire whether there be anything more specific required of us and competent to us, the tendency of which according to God's arrangements is, and the result of which therefore may be expected to be, that this guidance and assistance shall be vouchsafed to us. And here our attention is at once arrested and fixed by the great scriptural doctrine that God giveth his Holy Spirit to them that ask him. This at once opens up to us a great privilege, and imposes upon us an important duty—the privilege and the duty of prayer. If our knowledge of the meaning of God's word depends upon the special agency of the Holy Spirit, and if the Holy Spirit is promised to them that ask him, then it is the duty of all who desire to know fully and correctly the meaning of the Bible, to pray without ceasing. It is with prayer as a duty rather than as a privilege that we have here to do, for it comes before us in this shape, that one leading and fundamental rule to direct us in seeking to attain to a knowledge of God's word is, that we must abound in prayer and supplication for the guidance of the Spirit of truth. This needs scarcely any explanation. The great matter is, that the obligation of the duty be deeply impressed upon our understanding and our heart, and that the duty itself be faithfully and perseveringly discharged. But it is not enough that we make it a part of our ordinary supplications that the Spirit would guide us into all truth, and direct us to a correct knowledge of his

inspired word ; we should pray for his special presence and blessing upon *every* attempt we make to ascertain the meaning of Scripture in any portion of his word to which our attention may at any time be directed. Let me just impress upon you and earnestly entreat you to remember and apply these plain considerations, that men, admitting the great truths to which I have briefly adverted, and yet not accompanying all their attempts to investigate the meaning of any portion of God's word with fervent prayer for the guidance of God's Spirit, plainly prove that they have no real desire to know what God has revealed to men in the Bible, and therefore need not be surprised, and have no right to complain that they continue in ignorance, or that they fall into error ; and that, on the contrary, men whose fervent prayers for the enlightening influence of the Spirit precede and follow all their attempts, in the use of appropriate means, to ascertain the meaning of the statements of Scripture, will not only be preserved from all dangerous error, but will attain to a much more correct and complete knowledge of the Bible than they might be apt to anticipate, or than they could reach in any other way, that they will not only grow greatly in knowledge themselves, but will become fully able to instruct others also.

It is of the last importance that this great doctrine of the special agency of the Holy Spirit in guiding to the right knowledge of the sacred Scriptures should be understood, so far as it is revealed, that it should be believed, remembered, and applied by all of you, and it is my earnest prayer that he himself may impress it powerfully upon your understandings and your hearts, and enable you ever to act under its influence. But I cannot at present dwell longer upon it, and must conclude with pointing out two ways in which the doctrine has been and may be abused. Instances have sometimes occurred in which, where a difference of opinion arose about the meaning of a portion of Scripture, one of the parties has attempted to settle the dispute in this summary way, by asserting that *he* had the guidance and teaching of the Spirit, and that his opponent had not. This assertion might be true in itself, and he who made it might have good ground for believing it ; but such an assertion could make no salutary or beneficial impression upon the other party. It is true moreover that it is not a legitimate way of settling the dispute. The question remains—What

is the true meaning of this portion of Scripture ? This must be investigated and ascertained in the ordinary use of the appropriate means, and by the application of the usual legitimate tests, the examination of the meaning of the words singly and in their connection, and of the construction and relative bearing of the different clauses. Every man who puts an interpretation upon any portion of Scripture, and who urges it upon the adoption of another, is bound to establish its correctness, if called in question, by an examination of the words as they stand, and by a fair application to them of the recognised and legitimate principles of criticism. There is no standard but the law and the testimony, and however confident men may be that they have the guidance and teaching of the Spirit in the matter, they should not only remember that this consideration is of no weight in convincing another, but to guard themselves against error and delusion, to promote the interests of truth, to advance the honour of the word, and to secure the great objects for which it was inspired, it is incumbent upon all men—first, to draw all their opinions from a careful study and a correct interpretation of the actual words of Scripture ; and second, to be ever ready to state the grounds on which they have put this interpretation upon them, and to shew to those who differ from them that the opposite view is not really sanctioned by the correct explanation of the words which the Holy Spirit has actually employed. It has sometimes been imagined, or at least men have acted as if they imagined, that the agency of the Holy Spirit superseded the use or application of the ordinary and appropriate means of ascertaining the true and correct meaning of the actual statements of Scripture. This is a notion utterly destitute of foundation, and full of danger. Its tendency is to produce sloth and fanaticism, and to involve men in dangerous error. It has been often said, and said truly, in regard to the work of sanctification, that men should labour as if they could do all, and pray as if they could do nothing. So it is here ; men must use the ordinary appropriate means of acquiring an accurate critical knowledge of the meaning and import of the statements of Scripture, as if this were abundantly sufficient for knowing fully the revealed will of God ; and they must seek the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit, as if nothing else were of any use or advantage whatever. What the ordinary and appropriate means are we must now proceed briefly to explain.

LECTURE XLVII.

RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT, AND NECESSITY OF PERSONAL STUDY OF SCRIPTURE.

WE have considered the agency of the Holy Spirit in guiding to the true meaning and the right knowledge of the word of God, not professing at present to give anything like a full exposition of the illuminating agency of the Spirit in leading into all truth, as a great Bible doctrine, but merely such a brief statement of its general nature, and of its necessity and importance, as might illustrate the obligation of the great practical rule which the doctrine suggests as indispensable in the study of God's word, viz., fervent and habitual prayer for the assistance and guidance of the Holy Ghost. We directed your attention to the two great points in which the Bible is distinguished from all other books, viz.—first, that it was all inspired by the Holy Spirit; and second, that it can be rightly understood only through his special agency; and we endeavoured to point out to you how far and in what respects these important peculiarities should affect both the spirit and the manner in which it ought to be studied, and in which its meaning ought to be investigated. Let me again impress upon you the paramount importance of having regard in all your study of the word of God to the great truths upon this subject which have been set before you, and to the practical rules which they obviously suggest, since an application and observance of them is essential to your acquiring any real or valuable knowledge of God's revelation—any such knowledge of it as will be of any real avail to you either as men who have souls to be saved, or as ministers of the gospel who are called upon to labour and to watch for the salvation of the souls of others. All men who believe in the

existence of the Holy Ghost as a distinct person, admit in some sense the necessity of his agency to understanding aright divine truth and interpreting aright the statements of Scripture, though many have entertained very defective and erroneous notions upon the subject. Even the Papists admit that we are guided certainly to the right meaning of the word of God only by the agency of the Spirit; but they deny that the Spirit is promised to men in general and individually, or that they have a right to interpret Scripture for themselves. They hold that the promise is given only to the church, *i.e.* to office-bearers and representatives, that it consequently belongs to her to interpret, and that private individuals must take their views of the meaning of Scripture from the church's decisions. In order to establish these views Papists are bound to prove—first, that private individuals are prohibited from interpreting the Scriptures for themselves, or at least that they have no right to expect the guidance and assistance of the Holy Spirit in seeking to ascertain their meaning; and second, that God has authorised and established a permanent living infallible interpreter of Scripture in the church. On the second of these positions we formerly had occasion to make some observations directed to the object of shewing you—first, that God has not appointed any living infallible interpreter in the church; second, that the consent of the Fathers, by which they say that the church ought to be guided in the interpretation of Scripture, is not an authorised or a safe or a practicable standard to follow in this matter; and third, that the Church of Rome has no pretensions to this character, as she has never given an authorised interpretation of any chapter of Scripture, and as it can be conclusively proved that she has taught many doctrines professedly based upon the word of God, and yet manifestly inconsistent with the true meaning of its statements. As our principal object in this lecture is to illustrate the right and duty of men to interpret the Scriptures for themselves, in the exercise of their own faculties, and upon their own responsibility, to enforce upon you as the first great practical rule for guiding you to a correct knowledge of Scripture that you must, each one of you for himself, bring your own powers and faculties to bear closely and steadily upon the investigation of its meaning, we may advert now for a little to the first of these Popish positions. The ground taken by the

Papists upon this subject may be comprehended in these three assertions—first, that private individuals are prohibited by Scripture itself from interpreting it; second, that the teaching of the Spirit is promised not to individuals but to the church or its office-bearers; and third, that to give to each man the right of interpreting Scripture for himself upon his own responsibility, is just to make each man's notions and fancies his rule of faith.

Upon the first of these points the proof they commonly adduce, and the only one they have to allege, is 2 Peter i. 20—"Knowing this first that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Now, this declaration, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, is one the exact meaning of which it is not easy to ascertain or decide upon. Many different interpretations of it have been proposed, and it can scarcely be said that there is any one of them in the correctness of which the generality of competent judges are agreed.¹ There is no difficulty however in proving that, whatever may be its precise meaning, it affords no countenance whatever to the Papist notion that it prohibits or discourages private individuals from interpreting Scripture for themselves; for first, it applies, strictly speaking, only to the prophetic parts of Scripture, and not to the Bible in general; and second, it is deduced immediately as an inference from the great truth that prophecy was given by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and therefore it must respect all men equally, whether collectively or individually, whether in their public or in their private capacity. Indeed, of all the interpretations which have been proposed of this passage I am inclined to think that the one which is upon the whole best supported is that which assigns to it this meaning—that the prophecies of Scripture are not of their own revelation, that is, did not proceed merely from the authors who delivered them, and the reason is because then men spake not of their own will, but as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. But while the Popish notion of the unlawfulness of private individuals interpreting the Scripture for themselves thus derives no countenance from this passage, it is contradicted by all we know concerning God's great design in inspiring the Scriptures, in putting them into men's

¹ See Storrs and Flatt, p. 69.

hands, and requiring them to search and study them. If men are to read and search the Scriptures, the presumption at least is, and unless some clear and positive evidence on the other side can be adduced the certainty is, that they are not only entitled but bound to investigate their meaning and to ascertain it for themselves in the exercise of their own faculties. The same general idea may also be applied in refutation of the Popish assertion about the promise of the Spirit. If God has made his word public property and put it into men's hands that they may search it and know his will, and if the agency of the Spirit be necessary to enable men to make a right use of it, then the presumption, and unless positive proof to the contrary can be adduced, the certainty, is that those who have the written word are fully warranted to ask and to expect the guidance and teaching of the Spirit; and though there are some of the promises of the Spirit which it may be plausibly contended were addressed specially to the apostles, and can now be pleaded only by their successors as office-bearers in the church, yet it is not pretended that there is any scriptural authority for limiting the enlightening agency of the Spirit to them, or for holding that any who have the word of God, and are desirous to understand and apply it, are not warranted to ask and to expect this. It cannot be denied that there are many passages in the New Testament which clearly assert or imply that unconverted men are guided by the Spirit to the saving knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and that thereafter they are guided by him into all necessary truth; and as we have not now any certain means of knowing the will of God revealed for our salvation except through the written word, his enlightening agency must be exerted in guiding them to a right knowledge of the meaning of Scripture. And if they enjoy his guidance in leading them to a knowledge of those things which are necessary for salvation, they are warranted to ask and expect his assistance in all their subsequent attempts to ascertain, to realise, and apply the meaning of every portion of the sacred Scriptures.

But the most plausible consideration which the Papists adduce upon this subject is this, that if every man is entitled to interpret the Scripture for himself, this is just virtually to make each man's own notions or fancies as to the meaning of Scripture his rule of faith. But the plausibility of this vanishes when we just attend to the

true state of the case. No Protestant contends or admits that the rule of faith, the standard by which the opinions and conduct of men ought to be regulated, is anything else than the word of God as he has given it to us, or that men are warranted to put any interpretation upon any portion of the word of God that may suit their own fancy or inclination, their interest or convenience; and it cannot be shewn that these notions or anything like them are involved in, or deducible from, any principle they hold. The revealed will of God is wholly contained in the actual statements of his written word as it stands. It is all there, and nowhere else; that word, and that alone, is the standard. But who are to find out its meaning? and how is this to be ascertained? Those to whom God has given it are bound to use it to the best of their ability for the purpose for which it was given them. If God has appointed a living infallible interpreter to make known its meaning, they must of course submit implicitly to his decision; and if not, they must find it out for themselves, in the right use of such means and assistances as God has given them, or put within their reach. There is no medium between these two things, either men must receive the meaning of the statements of Scripture upon the authority of others, or they must ascertain for themselves and be fully persuaded in their own minds. God has not required—nay, he has plainly forbidden—us to receive the meaning of his word upon the mere authority of any man or body of men; and the conclusion therefore is inevitable, that we must investigate it for ourselves, and receive the doctrines and precepts ultimately upon the conviction of our own understandings that they are in accordance with what the word of God really teaches.

It may be a misfortune that we have not a living interpreter of Scripture on whose decisions we can safely rest, in whose decrees as to what really is the revealed will of God we are warranted and bound to acquiesce. But God has not provided and has not indicated to us any such interpreter, and therefore we must patiently submit to the want of it, seek to ascertain what is our own duty in the matter in the actual circumstances in which we are placed, and discharge it to the best of our ability. Many men may be placed in God's providence in circumstances in which they have very scanty and inadequate means of acquiring a full and certain knowledge of the meaning of God's word, and in which they

are to some considerable extent dependent upon others for the use and improvement of these means. The opportunities which men enjoy of attaining to a full and certain knowledge of the meaning of Scripture vary indefinitely according to their circumstances, from the case of those who have never been taught to read at all, and who are dependent wholly upon oral instruction, to those who can read the Scriptures for themselves in the original languages, all the intermediate stages being accompanied with great varieties in the collateral advantages or facilities for attaining to a correct and comprehensive knowledge of the Bible. But these diversities concern only the sovereignty of God in bestowing upon men privileges and opportunities according to his own pleasure, and as it seemeth good in his sight. They do not in the least affect, either in argument or in fact, the character of the written word, the purposes it was intended to serve, and its fitness for accomplishing these purposes, or what more immediately concerns our present subject, the duty of men in regard to the word, the obligations under which they lie to use and improve it for its intended objects to the utmost of their power, and upon their own responsibility. None of these considerations, nor any other, in the least affect the position either that the Bible is the only standard of faith and practice, or that men must use and improve to the utmost all the means they possess of ascertaining the real meaning of all its statements. Men have no right to bring any notions or fancies of their own into the Bible, to labour to get some countenance to them from the Scriptures, and then to hold them up, and to urge them upon others as being the mind of God. Their sole duty in the matter is just to ascertain what God has really revealed, *i.e.* to use with the utmost diligence, fidelity, and perseverance all the means in their power through which this result may be affected. A man's own mere notions or fancies as to the meaning of Scripture are and should be no rule to him or to others. The appeal is still, at all times and in all circumstances, and in opposition to all men's authority, to the declaration of God in his word, to the actual statements of the Holy Ghost rightly understood and applied. It is true that we have no infallible judge to decide authoritatively and conclusively upon the conflicting interpretations that may be put upon scriptural statements. But this we cannot help, and it does not in the least affect our duty or our

responsibility. If God has not given us an infallible interpreter of his word, neither has he required us to submit our understandings and our consciences to the authority of any man or body of men in forming our conceptions of what the meaning of any statement of his word is. He has put his word into our hands, he has not only given us a right, but he has imposed upon us an obligation to examine and to interpret it; he has laid upon us a serious responsibility, and he will himself call us to account for the use we have made of the opportunities he has given us of knowing his will. His will stands fully revealed in his word, whether men rightly understand and interpret it or not; and by that word must we all at last be judged. Men cannot escape from the responsibility which God has laid upon them. Every man must bear his own burden. Popish priests indeed consistently enough undertake for the salvation of those who submit to their control. Indeed the whole system of Popery may be said to be virtually summed up in this comprehensive principle, that the priests undertake for the salvation of the people upon condition that they give themselves up soul and body, understanding and conscience, person and purse, to their disposal. But they can give no security for implementing their share of the compact, and they ought to be regarded as being really agents of Satan, who consign their victims altogether into his hands. They are blind leading the blind, and they both fall into the ditch. All to whom God has given his word are bound to search and study it. They may be assured that in the due use of right means they will gain from it such a knowledge of his will as shall make them wise unto salvation. It is certain that no one who has access to the word of God, and who is able to read it, will fail of attaining that knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ which is eternal life, except through his own fault. But all men who have access to the word of God are bound to gain as correct and complete a knowledge of the meaning of all its statements as they possibly can; and this obligation is especially incumbent upon those who aspire to be the religious instructors of others. And what I am chiefly anxious to impress upon you is, that this knowledge in all its extent must be the result of your own personal study of the Bible. The agency of the Holy Spirit does not supersede the use of all natural, ordinary, and appropriate means for attaining a correct and exact

knowledge of the meaning of its statements; and the leading indispensable means of attaining this is a careful and exact personal study of it. It is not only true that we must not take the meaning of scriptural statements upon trust from any man or body of men, but that we must positively discover it ourselves by our own personal investigation. No man will ever have a clear and distinct apprehension of the meaning of any portion of Scripture unless he has really brought the powers and faculties of his own mind to bear upon it.

There are indeed many of the statements of Scripture which are so clear and simple that scarcely anything like investigation is necessary to ascertain their meaning. But there are many others of a different description, whose meaning can be ascertained only by much pains and study, and these therefore it is our imperative duty to employ. The most important practical lesson that can be enforced upon you, next to that of seeking and depending upon the enlightening agency of the Spirit, is that of the imperative obligation and the indispensable necessity of a close, careful, and persevering study of the actual statements of God's word, and of the assiduous devotion of all the powers of your mind, and all the resources of your understanding, to the object of ascertaining the precise meaning and import of everything that it contains. There is no real knowledge of the word of God to be gained, no clear and definite idea of the meaning of its statements, nothing like a well-grounded assurance that you have ascertained the mind of God in any part of his written word, unless you have yourselves closely and carefully studied it, unless you have subjected its words and clauses to an exact and rigid scrutiny. Nothing can compensate for the want of this. You must study the word of God yourselves; no one can do it for you. It needs and it fully merits the intense application of all your powers and faculties. Much indeed has been written to explain and elucidate the word of God, and much assistance is to be derived from the labours of those who have directed much attention to the interpretation of Scripture. But no reading of the works of illustrators of the Bible or commentators upon the sacred Scriptures will be of much avail in giving you a real knowledge of it, unless the powers of your own minds be brought to bear upon the investigation of it. It holds true universally in regard to every depart-

ment of study, that much assistance is to be derived from the labours of those who have trodden the same path before us. But it also holds true universally, that mere reading of what has been written by others, without the full and close exercise of our own faculties, will never lead us to the possession of any clear, well-digested, and effective knowledge of any subject. This holds especially true of the study of the Bible. No mere study of commentators will ever lead you to a knowledge of God's word at all worthy of the name, unless you carefully study the word itself. As you must bear yourselves the responsibility of all the opinions you form as to the meaning of scriptural statements, so you should see that you really form them, and know the ground on which they rest. While there is a great deal of ignorance of the real meaning of Scripture, a great want of clear and definite conceptions as to the import of its statements, so there is a great deal of what really differs little in substance from this, namely, of a taking our notions, such as they are, of the meaning of Scripture statements upon trust from others. It is right that we should know something of the labours of others in the interpretation of Scripture, and when rightly used they may afford us important advantages; but unless we really bring our own powers and faculties to bear upon the investigation of the meaning of Scripture, we shall not be able even to make a right and profitable use of the labours of others. We shall only be confused and perplexed by what we read, and shall gain no clear and sound knowledge of the Bible. Let it then be a fixed and fundamental rule with you to bring all your powers and faculties to bear upon the exact and critical investigation of the meaning of the statements of Scripture. Let no exertion be spared. Let all due attention be given, and let this attention be continued till you have not only formed a distinct conception of the meaning of any portion of Scripture to which your attention may be directed, but until you are masters of the grounds on which its true meaning can be established and defended. It is not indeed necessary, it would not be right, that the exact and careful attention to the precise meaning of words and clauses which we formerly, when illustrating the difficulty of interpreting the Bible, shewed you was implied in the duty of searching the Scriptures, should be exercised on every occasion.

When you read the word of God, you should often read it with a view to your own personal improvement, the cultivation of devout feelings and holy affections, without stopping to examine minutely the meaning of words and the import and connection of clauses. And even with a view to the mere object of understanding its meaning, it is necessary that you should sometimes read over considerable portions of it at once, in order to trace the general scope and connection, and the relation of the parts to each other, without attending much for the time to the precise meaning and bearing of particular statements. Still it must not be forgotten that a real knowledge of God's word depends upon an exact knowledge of the meaning of particular statements, and that this can be attained only by a minute and detailed critical investigation of their import. And while all your powers and faculties should thus be brought to bear upon the exact and careful study of the actual statements of Scripture, whilst this should be done, and done with assiduous and persevering application, it must be done under a deep feeling of responsibility. To ascertain and bring out the mind and will of God from his word is the most important work in which men can be engaged. Error or mistake here is more dangerous and injurious than anywhere else. If we fail to apprehend aright the meaning of any portion of Scripture from carelessness or negligence, from want of due study or attention, or from the indulgence of any prepossessions or prejudices of our own, from bringing any preconceived notions to the word, or from any desire to make it available for serving any personal or party object; in short, because we do not sincerely and supremely desire to know what is the mind and will of God, or do not rightly use the proper means of ascertaining this, we incur guilt, we sin against our own souls, and we become instrumental in injuring the souls of others. Ministers of the gospel, who are called upon to expound the word of God for the instruction of their fellow men, are under peculiar obligations to examine thoroughly and to ascertain fully the meaning of any portion of Scripture before they presume to explain it to or enforce it upon others. It is not enough in commenting upon any passage of Scripture that you bring forth many good and useful observations and admonitions, if you do not bring out the true meaning of the passage, and deduce your observations and admonitions from a correct interpre-

tation of it. This you must do if you would discharge aright your duty as the religious instructors of others, as able and faithful ministers of the New Testament. Whatever is necessary to fit and prepare you for doing this must be acquired and secured ; and when once acquired and secured, must be diligently, conscientiously, and perseveringly employed under a deep sense of your responsibility, with a sincere and paramount desire to effect this object, and with fervent prayer for the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit.



LECTURE XLVIII.

CONFESSION, CHAP. I. SEC. 9—SCRIPTURE ITS OWN INTERPRETER—DOUBLE SENSE—TYPES—GRAMMATICAL OR HISTORICAL SENSE.

WHAT is said in the Confession of Faith upon the subject of the interpretation of the Bible, is contained in the ninth section of the first chapter, and is in these words—"The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself, and therefore, where there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly." The leading positions taught here are these—first, that Scripture is its own interpreter; second, that its sense is not manifold but one; and third, that a knowledge of the meaning of the obscure passages is to be gained chiefly by comparing them with parallel passages, especially with those which are less obscure. And a brief consideration of these positions may suggest some useful practical observations concerning the interpretation of Scripture. First, then, the Scripture is its own interpreter, or the infallible rule of interpretation is Scripture itself. Now this does not mean that no other book but the Bible need be known and studied by those who are desirous to know aright the meaning of Scripture. The statement is not intended in the least to bear upon the question, which has sometimes been agitated, about the necessity and advantages of learning for the interpretation of Scripture. It is quite true that men, merely by carefully studying the English Bible, without reading other books, may gain a large measure of acquaintance with divine truth, so as not only to become wise unto salvation themselves, but to contribute much to the spiritual welfare of others. But

this has nothing to do with the question of the knowledge of God's word that ought to be possessed by those who have access to it in the original languages, and with the means by which this knowledge may be rendered as extensive, as accurate, and as complete as possible. And a thorough and accurate knowledge of the Bible in the original cannot be acquired without the perusal and careful study of many other books besides the Bible itself. The principle then that the Bible is its own interpreter does not imply that no other books are to be read and studied in order to acquire a thorough knowledge of its meaning. It does not preclude the use or application of any materials of whatever kind, or derived from whatever source, which are fitted in themselves, according to the ordinary principles of man's constitution, or the ordinary laws of philosophy and criticism, to afford any aid or assistance, direct or indirect, for attaining to a correct knowledge of its meaning. All these on the contrary it is the duty of men, as they have the means and opportunity, to use and apply. The declaration as it stands in the Confession was intended principally and primarily to exclude the application of tradition and the consent of the Fathers, and of everything out of the Bible itself, as authoritative rules or standards by which to judge ultimately and conclusively of the meaning of its statements. Tradition and the consent of the Fathers are not, as the Church of Rome maintains, infallible rules of interpretation, because—first, they do not, in point of fact, afford materials which can be brought to bear upon the explanation of many Scripture passages, for there are few if any texts, the meaning of which is now a subject of dispute, in regard to which it can be shewn that one particular view of their meaning prevailed generally in the early church, and was commonly adopted by the Fathers; and because, second, even if this could be established in regard to any particular passage, there is no ground for maintaining that this should at once, and of itself, be received as a sufficient authoritative reason for adopting that view of its import. The writings of the Fathers and the history of the primitive church contain materials which do throw some light upon the meaning of some words, phrases, and statements of Scripture; but these, like any other materials derived from any other source, are just to be judged of and applied according to the ordinary principles of criticism and interpretation, and are not in themselves possessed of any authori-

tative or determining weight. But while the statement in the Confession which we are considering was principally and primarily intended to exclude tradition and the consent of the Fathers from the position of an authoritative determining rule or standard in the interpretation of Scripture, it embodies at the same time, as we have already hinted, a great principle, excluding not only these things, but also, moreover, everything out of the Bible itself, from any such position of authority. "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is Scripture itself." The revealed will of God is contained there, and is to be found nowhere else. God has put it into our hands, and required us to search it. We are to ascertain the meaning of its statements, of the actual words as they stand, which the Holy Spirit dictated. When we have ascertained this, we have found the will of God on that point. God has given us no certain means of knowing his will but from his word, and no certain means of knowing the meaning of his word, but from an investigation of the actual statements which it contains. He has afforded us many aids and facilities for attaining to a knowledge of the meaning of his word; he has enjoined us to use and improve all these with the utmost diligence and perseverance, in the use of our reason, and in the full exercise of all our faculties, and he has promised the enlightening influences of his Spirit in answer to our prayers. In the humble and assiduous use of these means he requires of us to study his word, and to find out its true meaning. He enjoins us to concentrate our attention upon its actual words and statements, and to receive as coming from him the information which these words and statements really convey.

However wide may be the range of study we may take in preparing for the work of interpreting and expounding Scripture generally, to whatever sources we may have recourse in investigating the true meaning of any particular passage, we must always come back to the actual words of Scripture, seek to ascertain their true and exact meaning, and there we must rest. There is nothing above or beyond them, there is nothing beside or apart from them, that conveys to us authentically or authoritatively the will of God for our salvation. The written word must be at once our starting-point and our goal; and any firm persuasion or assurance we can ever attain to, that we have really found out the mind and will of God, must be based at once upon the agency of the Spirit on our under-

standings and our hearts, and upon the clear perception of our own minds that *this* is indeed the true meaning, the actual sense of the words which the Holy Spirit has dictated. It is indeed impossible to understand how, consistently with man's character as a rational being, and with the actual exercise of his reason in the receiving of truth, he can be intelligently persuaded that a particular sense is the true meaning of certain words, unless he has himself examined the words themselves, applied to them in the exercise of his own faculties the ordinary rational principles and rules by which the meaning of words is to be investigated and ascertained, and come to a clear conclusion upon the subject. But the principle that the Scripture is its own interpreter implies not only negatively that nothing out of Scripture, neither tradition nor the consent of the Fathers, nor anything else, is to exert an authoritative weight in determining our conclusions as to what its meaning is; but also moreover, positively, that Scripture itself contains abundant materials for aiding and assisting us in the interpretation of its own obscurer passages, and that to these materials furnished by Scripture itself must the appeal ultimately be made in all questions that may arise as to the meaning of particular statements. The illustration of this topic falls naturally under the third position which we have mentioned as suggested by the doctrine of the Confession; and in the meantime we proceed to advert to the one which stands second in order, and which is introduced parenthetically, viz., that the sense of Scripture is not manifold but one. This position too, like the former one, was principally and primarily intended as a denial of a common Popish doctrine; though, like it too, it contains an important general principle of extensive practical application. The Papists have usually contended that the sense of Scripture is not one, but manifold, or at least fourfold. Their views upon this point are thus explained by their great champion, Cardinal Bellarmine.¹ He says that it is a peculiar property of the sacred Scriptures as being the word of God, to have two senses, the literal or historical, and the spiritual or mystical; and of the spiritual sense, as distinguished from the literal, he makes three divisions, viz., the allegoric, when the words of Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, signify, besides their literal sense, something connected with Christ

¹ *De Verbo Dei*, lib. viii. chap. iii. p. 56.

and his church ; the tropologic, when words and actions are applied not literally to signify something connected with moral conduct ; and the anagogic, when they are applied to signify something connected with eternal life. These ill defined and baseless distinctions are chiefly applied by the Romanists for the purpose of trying to render the Scripture obscure and uncertain. It is not necessary to enter into anything like a formal explanation and exposure of them. There can be no doubt that the statement of the Confession, viz., that the sense of Scripture is not manifold, but one, was just intended to deny these Popish notions upon this subject, and to deny nothing else. There is no reason why any one should hesitate about subscribing to the statement of the Confession, though he should hold what is commonly called the double sense of prophecy—first, because historically and as a matter of fact, the statement was not intended as a denial of that doctrine, but merely of the Popish principle to which we have referred ; and second, because the doctrine of a double sense of prophecy is not really inconsistent with the words in which the statement of the Confession is expressed. What is commonly called the double sense in prophecy is not properly a double sense of a statement, but a double reference or application of a statement which has but one sense.

The advocates of what is called a double sense contend that there are predictions in the Old Testament which had a fulfilment in some person or transaction in Jewish history soon after they were originally uttered, and which also had a fulfilment in the person and history of our Saviour. But they do not contend that the *words* in which the predictions are expressed have two different senses or meanings, or that in interpreting and ascertaining their meaning anything else is to be done but to ascertain their literal meaning, or that any other means are to be employed than just the ordinary grammatical and critical rules of investigation. The sense of the words is one, though the reference or application may be twofold. It can scarcely be denied that the Holy Spirit might dictate certain words which, literally and grammatically interpreted—*i.e.* though having but one sense or signification, and that the literal or grammatical one—might apply equally to and be fulfilled in two different transactions. This is what is alleged to have been done in some instances by the advocates of what is called

a double sense, who however attach only one sense to the actual words in which the prediction is expressed. They adopt the doctrine of a double sense upon this general ground, that they find some predictions in the Old Testament with respect to which they are persuaded, not from an investigation of the meaning of the actual words of the prediction, but from the context describing the circumstances in which, and the object for which it was delivered, that it was intended to apply to and be fulfilled in some event soon to take place in Jewish history ; while they also find in the New Testament authority for believing that this same prediction was intended to apply to and be fulfilled in Christ, the *one* sense of the actual words of the prediction, critically and correctly interpreted being, as they think, equally applicable to both. There is here, you see, no ascription of a double sense to the words of the prophecy, though the doctrine is commonly called by that name, but merely a conviction upon independent and external grounds that the one sense of the words admits of and was intended to have a twofold reference or application. You need then have no hesitation in adopting the doctrine of the Confession that the sense of Scripture is not manifold but one, although you should come on examining this question to entertain the view of what is commonly called the double sense of prophecy. In regard to the reality of what is understood of the double sense of prophecy, I may say that the subject is attended with very considerable difficulty, but that I am inclined upon the whole to adopt it, *i.e.* I think there are some predictions in the Old Testament which are proved by the context to refer to events which took place soon after they were uttered, and are also proved by the testimony of the inspired writers of the New Testament to refer to Christ, while the one sense of the words of the predictions themselves applies equally to both. We have stated what this position, that the sense of Scripture is not manifold but one, was intended to deny, and we have shewn you in one important instance what it was not intended to deny ; but it may also be fairly regarded as teaching some important practical truths. The sense of Scripture is one. This one sense of Scripture is of course the literal or grammatical sense, or that which is brought out by a careful and diligent application of the ordinary principles and rules of philology, grammar, and criticism to the investigation of its meaning. This

principle, that the one sense of Scripture is the literal or grammatical sense, is not inconsistent with a regard to the distinction between the proper and the figurative use or sense of words, although the proper as distinguished from the figurative is sometimes called the literal meaning. In the Bible, as in all other books, words are sometimes used properly and sometimes figuratively or tropically. The question whether in a particular case a word be used properly or figuratively is at all times a proper subject of investigation, and the investigation in some instances is attended with considerable difficulty, and accordingly the principles and rules to be applied in ascertaining and interpreting the tropes or figures of Scripture under the different heads of metaphors, parables, allegories, &c., occupy an important and prominent place in treatises on general hermeneutics. Still it is a subject which comes fairly and fully within the province of philology and criticism, to be regulated by principles common to language, though modified by circumstances peculiar to the languages of Scripture. And everything bearing upon the decision of the question, whether a word in a particular passage is to be interpreted properly or figuratively, and if figuratively, what it truly means, is thus fairly comprehended in the investigation of the literal or grammatical sense, in accordance with the ordinary principles and laws of language and criticism. Neither is the principle that the one sense of Scripture is the literal or grammatical at all inconsistent with there being many things described or spoken of in Scripture which are and were intended to be types, symbols, or emblems of other things.

Types or symbols are not statements to be interpreted, but they are persons or facts or observances which resemble other persons, facts or observances, and were intended to bring these other things before our minds, and to assist us in understanding and realising them ; and in regard to them, as well as all other parts of Scripture, our duty is, and our object should be, just to find out the literal grammatical meaning of the words which describe or refer to them. As to their typical or symbolical character and application, this can be certainly learnt only from the statements of Scripture itself, understood in their literal or grammatical sense. It is not enough to warrant us in regarding anything as a type of another that we can trace some resemblance between it

and what we regard as its antitype. We must have some evidence from Scripture that God intended the one to be a type of the other, and has thereby authorised us to use and employ what is said in Scripture about the one, for enabling us to form clear and impressive conceptions of the other; and unless this rule be carefully observed, men are in much danger of indulging their imagination in tracing out resemblances of their own invention, or what is commonly called spiritualising or allegorising Scripture, a practice commonly attended with much more injury than benefit both to sound knowledge and piety. When men set themselves to find out resemblances between one person or fact described in Scripture, and some other person or fact also described there, they are very apt to overlook or disregard the rules by which the investigation of the literal or grammatical sense of the statements concerning them ought to be regulated, and to be led to treat the Scriptures as if they had no certain definite meaning, and to act as if men were at liberty to turn and twist them as they choose. There is quite enough in Scripture, literally and grammatically understood, to instruct and to edify, without men exerting their imaginations to put upon it constructions and to make of it applications which a correct interpretation of the words themselves does not suggest, and which there is no reason to believe that the Holy Spirit who dictated it ever intended. It is of great importance that you should be deeply impressed with the conviction that the sense of Scripture is but one, and that this one sense is to be discovered and ascertained only by a careful and exact investigation of the literal and grammatical meaning of the words as they stand. There they are; they are God's words. He has given them to you, that by ascertaining their meaning you may know his will; and therefore all the powers of your mind, wielding and applying all the materials which are fitted to contribute to effect this object, should be brought to bear upon them. Some persons, under the pretence of exalting the honour and dignity of the Scriptures as the word of God, have laid down the principle that the Scripture has all the senses of which its words are capable; and then in following out this principle, have exerted their ingenuity in wresting and torturing every passage for the purpose of bringing out of it a variety of meanings. This is certainly doing no real honour to Scripture, for it is just

representing it as utterly unfit for the purpose which we know it was intended to serve, viz., to convey to us distinctly, authentically, and infallibly the will of God.

The literal meaning of the statements of Scripture, which is the one and the only true sense, is very generally known in modern times by the name of the grammatico-historical sense. This compound word is intended to convey these ideas: that the statements of Scripture are to be interpreted by an exact investigation of the meaning of the words, according to the ordinary rules of philology and grammar; and that the actual meaning of the vocables, and the actual import of the phrases and constructions occurring in the books of Scripture, are to be ascertained by testimony as matters of historical fact. This is undoubtedly a sound principle. There is no certain way of knowing the import of statements in a dead language, but by ascertaining as a matter of historical fact what meaning was actually attached to the words, phrases, and combinations of words; and this points out the path which all who would thoroughly investigate for themselves the meaning of works written in a dead language must pursue, illustrating at the same time the difficulty of the labour, and the precision with which its results ought to be sifted and applied.

It is right however to warn you of a sense in which the phrase, the *historical sense* or *historical interpretation* is often employed by German writers, in which the principle it indicates is erroneous and dangerous, and in which it is applied by them, as it is certainly fitted to undermine the authority of Scripture, and to deprive it of all fitness or competency of serving *now* as a rule of faith and practice. It is in substance this, that we are not to seek directly and primarily in investigating, for instance, the meaning of the discourses of Christ and of the epistles of the apostles, what were the ideas which they really intended to convey, and which their words correctly interpreted express, but only what were the notions which their hearers, with all their ignorance and prejudices, were likely to attach to their statements, assuming that Christ and his apostles knew nothing more than those whom they addressed, could not rise above the notions that generally prevailed around them, and could not have intended to enlighten their minds and to correct their errors. They then try to find out historically,

though they are often satisfied with very scanty evidence, for none are more credulous than infidels, what were the then prevalent notions upon many of the subjects spoken of, and make these, or their own impressions regarding them, and not the grammatical meaning of the words, the standard of interpretation. It is stated and briefly though conclusively exposed in Davidson's *Sacred Hermeneutics*, pp. 226, 227. It is also admirably exposed by Titmann in his preface to his *Commentary upon John* recently translated in the 44th vol. of the *Biblical Cabinet*, and by Storr in his *Dissertatio de Sensu Historico* in the 1st vol. of his *Opuscula Academica*, where also the true nature and foundations of the grammatical or grammatico-historical interpretation of Scripture are expounded and established. You should ever remember that every word, every phrase, every clause, and every sentence in Scripture has a meaning ; that this meaning is one ; that God gave it this meaning ; and that it is the literal or grammatical sense of the words ; and that it is our duty to ascertain it as far as possible accurately and certainly. The meaning is not in any instance indefinite nor arbitrary in itself. There may be passages the meaning of which after all our investigations we may not be very sure that we have ascertained ; but we are not on that account to doubt that they have, and were intended to have, a meaning, and to convey to those who may ascertain it some definite information. The meaning of no passage of Scripture is arbitrary. We have no right to put upon any statement of the Bible any meaning we choose, any meaning that may suit or favour our own inclinations, fancies, or prepossessions. We must not bring our notions and wishes to the Scriptures, to get countenance for them, or to employ them as the standard by which we judge of the import of its statements. We must come to the Scripture to investigate carefully, in the use of appropriate means, the true meaning of its declarations ; and we should not forget that the meaning of every word, phrase, clause, and sentence in Scripture is really a matter of historical fact, to be settled by an impartial, and, if necessary, by a deliberate and persevering investigation of the appropriate evidence according to distinct and well-established rules. If this truth were realised and recollected, it would impress us with a deeper sense than is commonly entertained of the importance and difficulty of the critical study of the Bible ;

it would put us upon the right road for investigating and ascertaining its true import. It would tend to preserve us in our study of the Scriptures from carelessness, laziness, and error, chaining us down as it were to a mode of operation which requires of us cautious, careful, persevering labour, a constant watch over our own tendencies and prepossessions, the diligent application of all our powers and faculties, and the conscientious employment of all our resources. And we may be assured of this, that if we are at the same time duly sensible of our dependence upon the enlightening agency of the Spirit for the right understanding of his word, and abound in prayer for his guidance, we shall not the less fully receive the promised blessing from God because we are humbly, assiduously, and perseveringly engaged in the use of those means which are fitted in their own nature as means to produce the desired result.



LECTURE XLIX.

CONTEXT—PARALLEL PASSAGES—ANALOGY OF FAITH.

THE doctrine taught in the ninth section of the first chapter of the Confession of Faith upon the subject of the interpretation of the Bible may be embodied in three propositions—first, that the Bible is its own interpreter, or that the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself; second, that the sense of Scripture is not manifold, but one; and third, that difficulties that may arise about the meaning of particular passages are to be removed chiefly by an examination and comparison of other passages of Scripture, where the same or similar words, phrases, or constructions occur, and where the same or similar subjects are treated of, and are perhaps more clearly expressed. In last lecture we explained and illustrated the first two of these positions, shewing you what were the errors against which they were intended to be directed, what are the great general principles of positive truth which they assert or involve, and what are the practical lessons which they suggest to guide us in the careful study and correct interpretation of the word of God. We have now to advert to the third position. Now, this position obviously directs our attention to two important topics, usually discussed in works on hermeneutics under the heads of parallel passages and the analogy of faith. The topics we have already considered have borne chiefly upon the way and manner in which the meaning of words, phrases, and constructions, viewed by themselves, is to be investigated and ascertained, by the help of the information which is usually derived, in the first instance, from grammars and lexicons, but which as we shewed you, is not to be received implicitly upon the authority of grammarians and lexicographers, since there is a higher standard to which the ultimate appeal

must be made, even the actual usage of the language itself as exhibited in the works of those who understood and employed it. The highest authority indeed for settling the meaning of any word, phrase, or construction occurring in a writing in a dead language is that of the writing itself, or of its author. And even when the writing itself does not give us any formal statement of the meaning in which words, phrases, and constructions are employed in it, there is often much information of a pretty certain and satisfactory kind to be gathered indirectly from the context, from what goes before and comes after. And a careful and exact scrutiny of the context and of the scope of the passage ought never to be omitted in investigating the meaning of any passage, the import of which is a subject of difficulty and dispute. Books on hermeneutics usually give some rules or directions to assist students of the Scriptures in investigating the context and scope of the passage; but from the nature of the case they are somewhat vague and indefinite, and of no very great practical utility. The importance and necessity of this process, and the way of conducting it so that its advantages may be fully realised, are best illustrated by examples, and these our time does not permit us to adduce. Mere rules are not here of any great practical benefit. A knowledge of the principles of what has sometimes been called general or universal grammar, acquired by a careful study of a variety of languages, combined with discernment and discrimination, and the tact and skill acquired by experience, will alone enable you to conduct this process aright, and to derive from it the important advantages which it is fitted to confer. It is however to what are commonly called the comparison of parallel passages, and the analogy of faith, that the position we are at present considering more immediately directs our attention. These topics are also usually discussed in works on hermeneutics, though by a large class of writers the latter, viz., what is commonly called the analogy of faith, is either neglected altogether, or very lightly regarded. The importance of the comparison of parallel passages is based upon these general considerations—first, that the highest authority in determining the meaning of any statement is that of the author himself, or of the writing in which it occurs; and second, that the more frequent cases we have of his using the same words, phrases, or constructions, or of his expressing

the same or similar sentiments in somewhat different connections, and with somewhat different accompaniments—the better means we have of ascertaining their true meaning and import, *i.e.* the sense in which the author actually uses them. And while the other parts of the same writing where the statement occurs, the meaning of which we are desirous to ascertain, and next, any other writing of the same author, has the highest claim upon our attention, other similar writings and of the same period, composed by men placed in similar circumstances, and directed to similar objects, are also fitted to afford us important assistance in interpreting. The subject of the comparison of parallel passages affords somewhat more scope for rules and directions that may be of some use in assisting the student of the Bible than that of the context and scope of the passage admits of, though here as in the former case the subject can be best illustrated by examples; and it holds true to a large extent that no mere rules or directions, without certain mental endowments, natural and acquired, will be of much avail in applying aright this important source of knowledge for ascertaining the true meaning of the Scriptures.

The parallelism of passages has been divided into two branches, verbal and real, or parallelism of words and of things. In regard to words, any passage may be said to be a parallel one where the same word or phrase occurs, and in regard to any important word of doubtful import, the only way of attaining to a full knowledge and a thorough certainty about its meaning or meanings is to examine and compare *all* the passages in Scripture in which the word or any of its parts or derivatives occur, and to ascertain and estimate the light which the adjuncts or accompaniments of the word or phrase in each instance of its occurrence may throw upon its meaning and application. The great practical auxiliary in this department of work is of course a concordance to the original languages of Scripture, though, as I mentioned to you before, some lexicons to the Greek Testament are so constructed as virtually to serve the purpose of a concordance, with the superadded benefit of the commentary of the lexicographer, and any additional information or authorities he may have collected from other sources, to aid in establishing the meaning of the word or phrase. Concordances to the Hebrew of the Old Testament are scarce and expensive;

but a concordance to the Greek of the Testament, published in this country by Bagster, who has done so much in publishing the Bible in many languages, is cheap and accessible, and ought undoubtedly to be procured and employed by every one who seeks to be thoroughly versant in the language of the New Testament.¹ What is called real parallelism, or parallelism of things or ideas, is attended with greater difficulty, as we have not here the palpable identity of the word or phrase to guide us. There are passages where the same word or phrase occurs as in the one under consideration, where yet there is no identity or similarity in the subject treated of, or in the thought or sentiment expressed, and where of course the information that may be derived from the comparison can respect only the meaning of the particular word or phrase. And there are passages where, though the same word or phrase may not occur, the same subject may be treated, and a thought or sentiment that is manifestly in some respects similar may be expressed. And hence, in regard to this latter class, it becomes a matter of importance to attempt to ascertain or determine whether the passage be parallel or not, or rather to ascertain what the passages are which are really parallel to the one the meaning of which we may be investigating. And some books on hermeneutics profess to give rules and directions for assisting us in deciding what sort of passages are really to be considered as parallel, and ought to be examined and compared with the view of throwing light upon the one to which our attention may be directed. These rules are not of any very great practical utility, for in this whole process of selecting and comparing parallel passages the appeal must be ultimately to the dictates of sound reason and common sense, and men must be directed by their own sagacity, discernment, and skill, under the guidance of the Spirit of God. It is impossible however to overrate the importance and advantages of a careful, patient, and persevering examination and comparison of parallel passages in order to a correct and thorough knowledge of the meaning of Scripture. Indeed, we may say that except through the diligent, unwearied, and habitual prosecution of this process, no real certain and well-grounded knowledge of the word of God can be acquired. It is quite manifest from the whole structure of the word of God that its

¹ Schmidt's *Concordance*.

author intended that it should be studied in this way, and that he has virtually made a knowledge of it dependent upon each man for himself adopting and carrying through this mode of investigation. It does not contain anything like a systematic classification or arrangement of information on any of the subjects which it brings under our notice.

The principal subjects which the word of God was intended to make known to us are scattered over its pages and presented to us in different aspects, more clearly, more fully, more directly and formally, or the reverse, and in different connections and with different accompaniments, in the various passages where they occur. And this of course was arranged and effected by God in the exercise of his manifold wisdom in order to serve important and useful purposes in connection with the great end for which his word was given. It manifestly requires of us, if we would know fully and certainly the revealed will of God, that we seek to collect together and compare with each other the different passages in which the same subject is adverted to, and in which the same or a similar thought or sentiment is expressed; whence we infer that it was God's purpose that we should do this; and from this again we infer that in carrying on this process, and in prosecuting it in a right spirit, we have special reason to expect the assistance of him who dictated and fashioned the written word. We know fully the mind and will of God upon any particular topic, either of doctrine or duty, only when we have examined and investigated the meaning of all the different portions of his word that bear upon it, and are able to state the joint or combined result of them all. This is an important consideration that ought never to be lost sight of, more especially as the history of the church so fully and so impressively shews us that many errors and heresies have arisen from partial views of divine truth, from disproportionate attention being given to some statements of God's word, without investigating and comparing other statements which also bear upon the elucidation of the same topic. The subject of the comparison of parallel passages, however, as a *means of interpretation*, i.e. as forming a subject of investigation in exegetical as distinguished from systematic theology, bears rather upon this more limited object, viz., how an examination of parallel passages assists in ascertaining the full and exact meaning of some one particular passage, the import of which

we wish to ascertain. And in regard to this point it may be confidently affirmed, from a regard to the nature of the case and the voice of experience, that the process is indispensably of imperative obligation, and that its advantages are so great that they cannot be exaggerated, and can be appreciated fully only by those who have tried it. The assistance to which you will most naturally have recourse in prosecuting this work is that of a Bible furnished with a collection of marginal references to parallel passages. But you must remember that you are still to exercise your own judgment as to the parallelism of the passages thus pointed out to you, their bearing upon the passage more immediately under consideration, and the way and manner in which they ought to be applied for elucidating its meaning and bringing out its real import; for you will soon find, if you take any of the more copious collections of references to parallel passages, that many of them are ill-selected and far-fetched, and serve rather to perplex you than to throw any light upon the point you are investigating; while at the same time it should not be forgotten that merely by a skilful selection of references to passages alleged to be parallel men may insinuate interpretations and views of divine truth which ought not to be received without careful investigation.¹

We have now only to advert to what is commonly called the analogy of faith, as bearing upon the interpretation of Scripture. The phrase is taken from Romans xii. 6—"Having therefore gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith"—*κατα την αναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως*. It does not seem, however, to be here employed by the apostle in the same sense in which it is commonly used in hermeneutics. The apostle seems to mean by it the measure or amount of faith which any person endowed with the gift of prophecy possessed, *i.e.* the measure of knowledge of divine things which had been supernaturally communicated to him, and which he had apprehended by faith. Among writers on hermeneutics, it is commonly employed to designate the general scheme or system of divine truth, in its great principles; and when it is set forth as a principle or rule that ought to guide us in the interpretation of Scripture, what is meant is, that the interpretation of particular passages ought to be in accordance

¹ Horsley. Scott, *Preface to Bible, Postscript*.

with the general scheme of truth taught in the Bible, or at least should not contradict it. This, as a general rule, is an obvious principle of common sense and fairness. It is usually applied by interpreters even to ordinary human writings—*i.e.* if an obscure passage is met with in any author, the precise meaning of which it is not easy to discover, it is reckoned fair and reasonable that one of the different possible or probable interpretations should be preferred which is most accordant with the known views and sentiments of the author; or at least, if possible, one that shall not contradict or oppose them. What is thus held right and reasonable in the interpretation of ordinary human writings, is equally reasonable and incumbent in the interpretation of Scripture; and indeed all the more so because of their inspiration. When the Scriptures have once been proved to have been given by divine inspiration, this great truth should be ever remembered and applied in laying down the principles by which the interpretation of them ought to be regulated, and in actually interpreting them, as well as in applying the views which a correct interpretation of them brings out. We are called upon to have respect to the analogy of faith in interpreting Scripture, not merely upon general principles held fair and reasonable in regard to ordinary human writings, and not merely even upon the ground that it is all inspired, and must therefore be all consistent with itself, but likewise upon this additional and more special ground, that while it is the undoubted duty of every man to whom God has given his word to acquire as correct and extensive a knowledge as he possibly can of the meaning of all its statements; yet it was *one great leading design* of God, in inspiring and communicating his word, to make known to men *some great fundamental views of doctrine and duty*, which are most clearly revealed in it, and which the Holy Spirit certainly teaches to all to whom he communicates that knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ which is eternal life. Until men have been brought to know and understand aright these first principles of God's oracles, they have no real knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures, and all their labours and efforts in interpreting them will be only groping in the dark. And, on the other hand, when their eyes have once been opened by the Spirit to discern these fundamental principles in the Scriptures, they will feel not only warranted, but constrained to

bear them continually in remembrance, and faithfully to apply them in the investigation of the meaning of particular passages of Scripture whose import may be involved in some doubt or obscurity. We believe it is mainly because of the firmness and steadiness with which many men, who had no great critical knowledge of the Scriptures, have held by those great fundamental principles which they had been taught by the Spirit, and because of the resistance they were thus led and enabled to give to all attempts to seduce them into error, that many who were proud of their critical knowledge of the Scriptures, but who, there may be reason to fear, have not been taught of God, have set themselves in opposition to the analogy of faith as a principle or rule of interpretation, and under the pretence of adhering rigidly to the rule of just investigating accurately the meaning of each passage by itself, and thus drawing their views, as they allege, directly from the pure fountain of the word, unpolluted by human traditions and human systems, and uninfluenced by the authority of men, have in effect undermined, so far as their influence extended, the fundamental principles of divine truth, the principles which God has most clearly revealed, the doctrines which are most surely believed among all who have enjoyed the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit. Those who have opposed and scouted the analogy of faith as a principle of interpretation in the study of God's word, have usually been men who held unsound views of the great doctrines of the gospel, who had a great dislike to systematic theology, who professed to disregard and despise all attempts at classifying and systematising the information which God has communicated in his word, and to be concerned only about finding out the true meaning of each passage as it might come before them for investigation, without caring about its consistency with other passages, or with any general system of doctrines ; while, in most cases, they too had a system of their own, though circumstances might prevent them from bringing it much into prominence.

Most of these observations apply in some measure to Dr Campbell, of Aberdeen, who has discussed this subject in the fourth of his *Preliminary Dissertations* to his translation of the Gospels. His *Preliminary Dissertations* form a very valuable work, and are well worthy of a perusal, but they are characterised by a good deal of

the spirit and tendency which has just been described, and against which I think it right to warn you. His fourth dissertation is entitled, "Observations on the right method of proceeding in the critical examination of the books of the New Testament," and it contains much useful instruction for guiding and assisting those who wish to know critically and correctly the inspired records of Christianity, along with some things on the subject of the analogy of faith which are unsound and injurious. After giving many really sound and judicious rules for regulating the critical study of the New Testament, he proposes to assign the reasons why he discards altogether the analogy of faith, and the etymology of the words. His remarks on the usefulness of etymology as a means of interpretation are substantially correct, though perhaps carried too far, for there are cases in which we have little else than etymology to guide us in determining the meaning of words. And even in regard to the analogy of faith, he has some useful observations which ought to be attended to, as guarding against the abuse or improper extension of a regard to this standard as a rule of interpretation. But his views go virtually to exclude the operation of the principle altogether, and he bases them upon arguments and considerations which are destitute of any real weight. His main idea is, that the analogy of faith, if relevant and applicable at all, should include only those scriptural truths which are universally received as incontrovertible. In regard to these, he admits that no one ought to interpret any doubtful or obscure passage of Scripture so as to contradict them. But this limitation proceeds upon a sort of tacit assumption that no certainty exists or can be reached in regard to any of those doctrines of Scripture which have been controverted; that, in short, there are no clear and certain means, apart from the interpretation of obscure and doubtful passages, of deciding among those different systems of doctrine, which have been propounded by different sections of professing Christians; and it is here mainly that the mischief and the danger lie. It is quite true that doctrines must be clearly and certainly established upon scriptural grounds, before they can be applied in any measure, or to any extent, as tests or standards of what is, or is not, the meaning of particular passages. But surely men may attain to some considerable certainty in a rational way, and upon the strictest critical principles, as to the truth of some

doctrines which many professing Christians have denied, and may therefore rightfully and reasonably use these as in some measure tests of the meaning of particular passages, whose import is doubtful or obscure.¹ But while the principle of the analogy of faith may be rightly employed in the interpretation of Scripture beyond the limits which Dr Campbell would assign to it, it is right that you should distinctly understand that its function or influence after all is very limited, for much abuse may arise from going to the opposite extreme. It is still true that the great direct proper primary means of ascertaining the meaning of a scriptural statement is to investigate the precise import and the exact connection of the words which compose it, viewing them in connection with the preceding and succeeding context, and comparing it with other passages which are parallel to it, either in the words or in the thought. This is the proper primary mode of investigating the meaning of any scriptural statement, and ought never in any instance to be neglected or carelessly performed. It ought to take precedence of every other mode of ascertaining the meaning of a passage of scripture; and when it brings out a clear and unequivocal result, it virtually supersedes the application of any other test or standard. The meaning of the passage has been ascertained in the regular competent way, and the doctrine taught in it should be received as coming from God, and as infallibly true.

It is only when, after all due pains and diligence have been taken to ascertain the meaning of the passage by a critical investigation of the words, its meaning is still involved in obscurity, or when there are several meanings which, so far as we can see, the words might bear with almost equal probability, that we should have recourse to the analogy of faith, or to those scriptural truths which have already been fully established by the diligent application of critical materials and processes; and even then its function or office is not so much direct and positive, as indirect and negative—not so much to settle which one of the meanings the words would bear is that which ought to be attached to them, but to indicate the meaning or meanings which, because inconsistent with some well-established Scripture truth, ought not to be assigned to them. Men are very apt from ignorance of the true principles

¹ Carson's *Examination of the Principles of Biblical Interpretation of Ernesti, Ammon, Stuart, and other Philologists* (1836), pp. 106, 107.

of critical interpretation and want of the necessary critical knowledge and materials, or from sloth and carelessness, and the want of any adequate sense of the responsibility connected with investigating and ascertaining the true and exact meaning of each portion of God's word, to take up as the meaning of any passage to which their attention may be directed what may have occurred to them upon a very superficial view of it; and they may be quite satisfied with it, merely because it is in accordance with other passages, and with important truths which the word of God sanctions. The meaning ascribed to the passage may bring out what is really a scriptural truth, but it may not be the truth which is taught in that passage; and thus men, even when not teaching anything positively erroneous in itself may, through laziness and carelessness, be really perverting the word of God, and approximating to, if not actually committing, the sin of handling it deceitfully. It is of unspeakable importance that men have correct views of the leading principles of God's oracles, of those fundamental doctrines which constitute the substance of the Christian system, and on the belief and application of which their personal salvation depends; and it is right that they should apply these fundamental doctrines in the way of excluding or setting aside any proposed interpretation of an obscure or doubtful passage that may be inconsistent with them. But at the same time we should never forget that we are bound by the most solemn obligations to ascertain as far as possible the precise and exact meaning of every portion of God's word, that the direct and proper means of effecting this is a careful and impartial investigation of the words as they stand, according to the laws and rules of criticism, accompanied with fervent prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit; that no impatience, no sloth, no prejudice or prepossession should stand in the way of the faithful and persevering use of these means. And you may be assured that so long as you continue upon earth you will still have abundant scope in the careful study of God's word for all your talents and learning, for all your experience and activity, for all your gifts, natural and spiritual; and that when you abound and persevere in these exercises, you are fully warranted to cherish the expectation that you will grow in knowledge as well as in holiness, even until you enter upon that state where you shall see no longer through a glass darkly, but face to face, and where you shall know even as you are known.

LECTURE L.

CONFESSION, CHAP. I. SEC. 10—JUDGE OF CONTROVERSY.

THE tenth and last section of the first chapter of the Confession of Faith is expressed in the following words:—"The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture." This great truth may be regarded as at once the comprehensive summary and the practical result of all that has been already considered and established with regard to the origin, object, and authority of the inspired volume. And while the language in which it is expressed bears an obvious reference to certain controversies which have been agitated concerning this point, and cannot be fully understood without some knowledge of these controversies, while the proposition is and was intended to be a virtual denial of certain errors, yet it contains a positive and important practical truth which ought to be deeply impressed upon our understandings and our hearts, and ought ever to regulate our conduct. We have seen that the Bible is the only rule or standard of faith, to the exclusion of the Apocrypha and unwritten tradition, so that the whole revealed will of God which we are bound to understand, receive, and submit to, is actually contained in the words of Scripture, and is to be found nowhere else. The Church of Rome not only adds the Apocrypha and unwritten tradition to the written word as a part of the standard of truth or of the divine law, but alleges that there is in the church a living, permanent, infallible interpreter of the word of God, though the church herself has not decided, and her subjects are not agreed, as to where this power of infallibly interpreting

Scripture is lodged. They further maintain that this infallible interpreter of the word of God is the supreme judge by whom all disputes about religious subjects must be determined, to whom the ultimate appeal in all such matters is to be made, and to whose decisions men are bound to submit, receiving them as coming from God. Of course it is manifest that if there be any man or body of men who have been vested with the privilege of infallibly interpreting the word of God, he or they must be the supreme judge of all disputes that may arise about religious matters, and that men must receive their decisions as divine oracles. Protestants, however, maintain and prove that God has appointed no infallible interpreter to whose decisions, in declaring the meaning of Scripture as to any differences of opinion that may arise, men are bound to render submission; that the reasoning of Romanists about the necessity of an infallible interpreter and a living unerring supreme judge are unwarranted and presumptuous, and that even if they had more weight or plausibility in them than they possess, this would not affect the validity of the proof which has been adduced that in point of fact no such interpreter or judge has been appointed or exists, or of the still stronger and indeed absolutely overwhelming proof which has been brought forward that no such privilege of infallible interpretation or of unerring judgment has been vested in the Church of Rome. The Romanists claim for the church the privilege of infallibly interpreting Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that on this as the only adequate basis they may establish her right to the office of supreme judge of controversies, from whose decisions there is no appeal; and Protestants, by establishing upon the grounds adverted to in former lectures that God has not appointed, and that in point of fact there does not exist upon earth, a living infallible interpreter of Scripture, do thereby at the same time substantially prove that there is no supreme judge upon earth by whose decisions men are bound to regulate their opinions and their conduct in religious matters. The doctrine then brought before us in this section of the Confession does not, you see, materially differ in substance from what has already been explained and proved under the head of the rule of faith, though it presents the same principle under a somewhat different aspect. Since a claim has been set up in behalf of the Pope or a general

council to be the supreme judge in all differences or disputes about religious matters, Protestants in opposing this claim have in some measure accommodated themselves to the phraseology employed by their opponents; and while denying that there is any supreme judge upon earth who is entitled to decide all controversies of religion, and whose decisions men are bound to obey, claim this prerogative for the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures.

The Romanists admit that the Holy Spirit is the only supreme judge; but they contend not only that he speaks by unwritten tradition as well as by the written word, but also that he speaks by popes and general councils in deciding upon any differences or disputes that may have arisen about religious matters. Protestants contend not only that the written word given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit contains the whole revealed will of God, so that we need go nowhere else to find it, but also that he who is admitted on both sides to be the only supreme judge gives his decisions in no other tribunal and through no other channel than the written word which he has inspired. When the question is put, What is the rule of faith? it is for the purpose of settling this practical point, where should men go to, what source should they apply to, when they desire to know what is the mind and will of God; and when the question is put, Who is the supreme judge of controversies of religion? it is in order to settle this practical point, to whom should an appeal be made, and by whose decisions should men be guided when a difference arises about the interpretation of Scripture, or about any point of faith or practice. Protestants answer the former question by referring men to the written word as containing the whole revealed will of God, Romanists by referring them to the unwritten as well as to the written word. Protestants answer the second question in the same way as the first, or, merely accommodating the phraseology of their answer to that used in the question, they say that the only supreme judge is the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures; while Papists say in answer to the second question that there is upon earth a living supreme judge to be found somewhere within the pale of the Church of Rome, though they scarcely pretend to be very certain who or what he is, or to be very able to tell us how his decisions are to be procured or ascertained. The substance then of the truth

upon this point is, that if men in their study of the word of God meet with statements the meaning of which they find it difficult to understand, or from which after most diligent and prayerful study they deduce a meaning which brings them into collision with others, or involves them in controversial discussions, there is no human source to which they can have recourse for an authoritative and certain settlement of these doubts and difficulties, or for a decision which they are bound to submit to, of their differences with other men, that they must adhere with unshaken firmness to the supreme authority of the written word, make it still their one grand object to ascertain what is the true and real meaning of what the Holy Spirit has written, and receive nothing as an authoritative decision of the point—a decision which they are bound to submit to until they are satisfied that they have got the decision of the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures. There may be many sources to which men may apply to *assist* them in ascertaining the meaning of scriptural statements, making up their minds as to what is the deliverance of the Spirit speaking in the Scripture upon any controverted point which they may be called upon to consider. And there may be men or bodies of men whose opinion or judgment upon some obscure or difficult question is entitled to some weight or deference; but the word of God itself is alone authoritative, the decision of the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture is alone entitled of itself to the implicit submission of our understandings and our consciences. A judge is one who is authorised and entitled to decide litigated questions, and whose decisions, because he is possessed of rightful jurisdiction, are binding upon others and entitled to their submission and obedience. And as God alone is lord of the conscience, his decisions alone are entitled to be received as authoritative in any matter of religious opinion or practice. He has made known to us his law only in his word. He has given us no certain means of knowing what his mind and will is except by ascertaining the meaning of its statements. He has told us of no certain means of ascertaining what is the meaning of the statements of his word except by studying it carefully in the use of ordinary and appropriate means, while he has promised to them who ask him that the Holy Spirit who dictated the Scriptures shall be put forth to guide them unto all necessary truth.

The Papists, in advocating the claims of a living supreme judge who possesses rightful jurisdiction in religious matters, and whose decisions men are bound to obey, usually refer to those passages of Scripture which establish the distinction between rulers or office-bearers and ordinary members in the Christian church, and which vest in the former class a certain kind or degree of authority, and impose upon the latter some obligation to obedience. It is quite true that the New Testament fully warrants the distinction between office-bearers and ordinary members of the church, that it constitutes the office-bearers in a certain sense judges for determining controversies of religion, and vests in them a certain measure of rightful jurisdiction or authority, and imposes upon ordinary members a certain obligation to submission or obedience; but there is nothing in this general statement which necessarily implies that the decisions of ecclesiastical office-bearers have of themselves, and irrespective of their accordance with the written word, any power to bind men's consciences, and the ascription of any such power to them is in clear contradiction to fundamental principles plainly taught in Scripture. This is not an occasion for entering into anything like an exposition of that purely ministerial authority conferred by Christ upon the office-bearers of his church. All that is necessary or practicable at present is just to direct your attention to two important truths which are sufficient to mark out in what sense they are judges, and how entirely different in kind is any authority which can justly be ascribed to them from that of the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures—first, all men, whether collectively or individually, whether office-bearers or ordinary members of the church, who may be called upon to give an opinion or to pronounce a judgment upon any point of faith or practice, are bound in making up their opinion, or in pronouncing their judgment, to be guided exclusively by the written word, to have it for their one sole object to ascertain how the Spirit has decided the matter in the Scriptures, to continue in the use of all appropriate means until they have ascertained this to their satisfaction, and then to make the judgment pronounced by the Spirit in the written word the absolute and exclusive rule or standard of their opinion or judgment. Whatever authority or jurisdiction any man or body of men may possess in the decision of religious questions, or in the administration of the affairs of

Christ's visible church, it is altogether and absolutely subordinate to that of the Spirit speaking in the word ; second, no decision or judgment of any man or body of men, whether office-bearers or not, and however eminent they may be for their talent and learning, is entitled of itself to bind men's consciences, or ought to exercise any authority upon men's opinions or actions, unless it be, and except in so far as it is, accordant with the judgment of the Spirit speaking in the Scripture ; and of this accordance, each man must judge for himself in the exercise of his own faculties, and upon his own responsibility. I am not called upon at present to attempt to explain what rightful authority is still left to church courts and ecclesiastical office-bearers. But if these propositions are true, as they certainly are, they are quite sufficient to shew that the authority or jurisdiction or right of judging which ecclesiastical office-bearers possess is not in the least inconsistent with the great truth that the supreme judge, the only judge possessed of a real right to bind men's consciences, and authoritatively to determine their opinions and conduct in matters of religion, can be no other than the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures. While ecclesiastical office-bearers or church courts are in a certain sense, and with due regard to the limitation stated above, judges of the meaning of Scripture and of religious controversies, so every man is also in a certain sense a judge, and this too is in entire accordance with the Holy Spirit being the supreme judge ; nay, it is just because the Holy Spirit is the only supreme judge that every man is ultimately and finally a judge in a sense for himself.

As there is no infallible standard but the word, as there is no infallible judge but the Holy Spirit speaking in the word, it follows that if men have access to the word, and are at all capable of understanding its meaning, if they are possessed of liberty of conscience and of personal responsibility, they are not only entitled but bound to judge ultimately for themselves what is the meaning of Scripture and the judgment of the Holy Spirit, and not only are not required, but are not at liberty to receive as authoritative the decision of any man or body of men without being satisfied, as the result of their own personal investigation, that these decisions are in accordance with the mind and will of God revealed in his word. It is true that no man has individually

even that ministerial authority or jurisdiction which church courts possess, that he can judge only for himself, and not as entitled to exercise jurisdiction in any sense over others. No man has any right or title to require of any other to receive implicitly his interpretation of the meaning of God's word, or to submit to his judgment or decision in any matter pertaining to faith or practice. Some men may afford important assistance to others in ascertaining what is the meaning of Scripture, and in adopting a right mode of thinking and acting in regard to God and religion, but anything like authority properly so called is excluded. Any one man is just as much entitled as any other to judge for himself as to what God would have him to believe and to do. Every man is entitled to make up his own mind as to what is the decision given by the Spirit in the word; nay, he is bound to do this as judge of his own acts, and for the regulation of his own conduct, and the exercise of his own legitimate influence, be it what it may. As however no one man is invested with any authority or jurisdiction over any other in matters of religion, but is merely entitled to decide for himself with a view to the regulation of his own conduct, many authors in treating of this subject have thought it proper to make some explanations and distinctions while asserting the right of each man to judge. A judge in the strict and proper sense is one who is entitled to decide not only for himself but for others, as having some rightful jurisdiction over them, and being warranted to expect some kind or degree of obedience or submission on their part. In this sense the Holy Spirit speaking in the word is the supreme judge, being alone entitled authoritatively and ultimately to determine and decide all controversies of religion. In this sense also, ecclesiastical office-bearers or church courts are judges, being invested with a certain ministerial or subordinate authority in deciding, not only for themselves but also for others, all the questions which it is necessary to determine with a view to the execution of the function intrusted to them, viz., the administration, according to the standard of the word and the judgment of the Spirit, of the ordinary necessary business of Christ's visible church. But in this proper sense of the word no one man is a judge in any matter pertaining to religion, as he merely decides for himself as judge of his own acts, and with a view to the regulation of his own conduct, and possesses in no sense jurisdiction or authority over others. On

this ground some writers on this subject have suggested the propriety of holding that while every man, viewed singly and individually, may be said in religious matters *judicare*, he cannot be said *judicem agere*, he may be said to judge indeed or to decide for himself, but not to act the part of a judge as if he had any jurisdiction or authority over others; and the distinction, in whatever way it may be expressed, is one that ought to be understood and remembered as being fitted to throw light upon this subject.

I may remark in passing that there is another party besides ecclesiastical office-bearers, on whose behalf a claim to a right to judge, to exercise authority or jurisdiction in religious matters, has been often put forth, and whose claim rests upon a worse foundation if possible than that of the Bishop of Rome—I mean of course the civil magistrate, or the supreme civil authority of a nation, in whomsoever it may be vested. The civil magistrate has just precisely the same right to judge, the same jurisdiction or authority in religious matters as any single private individual has, *i.e.* he is entitled to decide on religious questions *for himself as judge of his own acts*, and with a view to the regulation of his own conduct and the exercise of his own legitimate influence; and in deciding in this sense, and to this extent, upon religious matters, the civil magistrate is bound just like any private individual to be guided solely by the standard of the written word, and is responsible to God for the decision to which he may come. But he has no authority whatever in this matter, not even that ministerial or subordinate authority which church courts possess, and no human being is called upon or is even at liberty to render any submission or obedience whatever to any decisions he may pronounce on anything connected with religion or the church of Christ. Any private man indeed who may profess to open up to us the true meaning of Scripture, and to point out to us the course which God's word sanctions or requires, is entitled to a hearing, while we reserve our own absolute and indefeasible right to judge of the truth of his interpretation of Scripture. The civil magistrate is entitled to nothing more than a hearing; and if he does not come with the word of God in his hand, and profess at least to open up to us its meaning and import, he is not entitled to even that. The claim on behalf of the civil magistrate to a

right of judging or deciding for others in religious or ecclesiastical matters, with a corresponding obligation on their part to obey, is more preposterous than that of the Bishop of Rome, as he at least professes to be an ecclesiastical office-bearer, deriving his authority from Christ, and directed by his Spirit ; and accordingly, while many churches have ignominiously submitted to this usurped and unlawful authority of Cæsar, scarcely any church has ever had the boldness openly and explicitly to defend it. Whenever men are called upon to take any part, collectively or individually, publicly or privately, in any controversies of religion, they must be guided by the standard of the word ; they must be determined by the judgment of the Holy Ghost speaking in the Scriptures. Other standards have been sometimes set up as entitled to regulate men's opinions and conduct on religious matters ; and though some of these may be entitled to a certain measure of respect, and when kept in their proper place and rightly applied, may afford us some assistance in ascertaining and comprehending fully the mind of the Spirit in the word, none of them is possessed of any authority ; none of them is capable of binding our consciences, or should of itself regulate or determine our judgment or practice. Some of the principal of them are mentioned in this section of the Confession, viz., the decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits. The decrees of councils are just in substance the opinions of ancient writers and the doctrines of men, though given in a somewhat more formal and solemn way. They are therefore possessed of no proper authority, and must be all examined by the written word, and the judgment of the Spirit speaking in the Scriptures. If they agree with this standard—and on this point men must judge for themselves on their own responsibility—they should be received ; and if not, we are not only entitled, but bound to reject them. It has been proved that there are councils against councils, as well as popes against popes, so that no rational man can receive all their decrees. Protestants have generally agreed in receiving the decrees of the first four general councils, held in the fourth and fifth centuries, in matters of doctrine, though not in matters of worship and discipline. But then they have received them, not because they ascribed any authority to the decrees of councils as such, or of

these councils in particular, but because by an examination of the word of God they were convinced that the doctrinal decrees of these councils, which respected chiefly the Trinity and the person of Christ, were in point of fact accordant with the judgment of the Spirit speaking in the Scripture. There has been no council since the age of the apostles, the decrees of which are entitled to be received as true and binding, without being examined by the standard of Scripture, or upon any other ground than their ascertained accordance with that standard.

The Westminster Assembly itself, though entitled to as much respect as can be lawfully accorded to any body of uninspired men that ever convened, has no authority over men's consciences. Men are entitled and bound to bring all its decrees, including the Confession of Faith on which we are commenting, to be examined by the standard of God's word, and by the judgment of the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures. You cannot of course lawfully or honestly receive it as the confession of your faith, unless and until you are satisfied of the entire accordance of its statements with the word of God ; and this you are called upon to investigate for yourselves, each one upon his own responsibility. While the church receives no one to the office of the ministry unless he declare his adherence to the Westminster Confession, she of course wishes none to apply for admission to minister within her pale unless he can make such a declaration at once intelligently and honestly ; and this is what no one can do unless he has fairly and impartially brought all its statements to be examined by the standard of the written word, and is really persuaded, as the result of his own personal investigation, that its doctrines are in accordance with the decisions of the only Supreme Judge. The private spirits here spoken of are impressions which enthusiasts and fanatics have sometimes had of views of doctrine and duty which they imagined or professed to have been communicated to them by the Spirit, apart from the statements of the written word, by the Spirit speaking to them individually through some other channel than the Scriptures. Everything of this sort too is to be examined by the word ; and, if not sanctioned by it, is to be rejected. We have good ground in Scripture for believing that the special agency of the Spirit is necessary for guiding men to the true meaning of Scripture, to any real effective useful knowledge of its

statements; but we have no ground to believe that the Spirit communicates to men any views of doctrine or duty, but what are contained in or may be deduced from the statements of Scripture critically understood. Men are called upon to form their whole opinions, and to regulate their whole conduct in regard to religious matters, from what is actually found in the sacred Scriptures; and when they profess any doctrines as having been taught them by the Spirit, and inculcate them upon others, they are bound to establish them by a fair examination of the true import of scriptural statements. This is the only standard; it liveth and abideth for ever. The Spirit speaking by it is the only supreme judge; and when we really desire to have God's word made a light unto our feet and a lamp unto our path, it becomes us to be deeply impressed with the conviction that it is the Spirit who is there speaking to us, that it is with him we have to do, in order that while we diligently and faithfully use all the natural and appropriate means of attaining to a correct knowledge of its meaning, we may cherish a sense of our entire dependence upon his special agency, have it for our one great object that we obtain his judgment upon every point that may occupy our attention, and then render to it the absolute and universal submission of our understandings, our hearts, and our lives.



LECTURE LI.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN I commenced my labours in this place, I addressed myself exclusively to the junior students who were commencing their theological studies, and who were to be placed under my own immediate superintendence; and I mean to follow the same course in now concluding the labours of the session. While reminding you of what we have done during the session, I am chiefly anxious to impress upon you the conviction that you have yet made very little progress in your theological studies, and that a very wide field of investigation still lies before you, and to suggest some directions adapted to the present state of your attainments, which may contribute to aid you in your progress. We proposed as the general object that should occupy your attention during this session the formation of such views, with a knowledge of the grounds on which they rested, of the origin, objects, and authority of the sacred Scriptures, and of the way and manner in which they ought to be interpreted and applied, as might impress upon you the necessity and importance of making it your great aim during the rest of your lives, to understand fully and correctly their meaning and import, and might set you on the right way of effecting this object. This leading design has been followed out in the whole business of the session, though I am sensible very imperfectly. The general subject thus proposed for consideration, though apparently simple, comprehends a considerable number of important topics of discussion, and to the most of them your attention has been more or less fully directed. Christian theology is based upon the great truth that God has supernaturally revealed his will to men, to guide them to the knowledge of himself, and to the eternal enjoyment of his presence. When taken in its more

restricted sense, it may be said to assume this as true, and to be itself, viewed as a science, directed to the object of opening up the information which God in this supernatural revelation of his will has communicated to us. Still the questions, whether God has made to men a supernatural revelation of his will, and if so, where it is to be found, and how its meaning and import may be ascertained, are of fundamental importance, and though but preliminary or introductory to the study of Christian theology strictly so called, require to be carefully studied and investigated, in order that your minds may be thoroughly made up concerning them, and in order that you may clearly understand yourselves, and may be able distinctly to explain to others, the grounds on which your convictions on these points rest. It is with these preliminary or introductory topics, called by some writers the *prolegomena* or *præcognoscenda* of Christian theology, that you have been chiefly occupied during this session. The evidences for the truth of the Christian revelation, for the divine origin and authority of the whole Bible, for its plenary inspiration, for the accuracy of the received Protestant canon, and the purity and integrity of the sacred text, for the exclusive authority of the Bible as the only standard of faith and practice, for its undivided supremacy as the sole arbiter of opinions and conduct, have been all more or less fully brought under your consideration. It is the establishment of the truth upon these points that brings home to men's understandings and consciences the obligation to study the sacred Scriptures, to employ with the utmost zeal and diligence all means by which they may attain to a correct knowledge of their meaning, and to submit implicitly to their teaching whenever their import is ascertained. Accordingly we have endeavoured not only to enforce upon you this obligation, but to point out to you what is necessary in order to a correct and exact knowledge of the meaning of the sacred Scriptures, and have explained the leading principles and rules by which you ought to be guided in conducting the study of them.

I regret that so little time was left for directing your attention at any considerable length, either to the theory or the practice of Scripture interpretation—*i.e.* either to hermeneutics or exegesis. Still I would fain hope that enough has been brought before you of the real nature and objects of the accurate interpretation of Scripture, and of the leading principles, as suggested both by

Scripture itself and the nature of the case, according to which the study of it ought to be regulated, as may contribute, through the divine blessing, to put you upon the right course in the prosecution of this most important object, or at least to guard you against errors into which you might be apt to fall, and to encourage you to prosecute the object with a zeal and diligence proportioned in some measure to its importance. But though all these subjects have been brought before you, I must warn you against imagining that they have been fully explained or discussed in the exercises of the class. Although you had succeeded, as you ought to have done, by meditation and reflection, in fixing in your minds, and converting, as it were, into a portion of your own intellectual furniture, all that was brought before you in the class, you would still be very imperfectly acquainted with these subjects, unless you had read and digested much more than has been here presented to you. I have all along acted upon the principle of abstaining from laying before you anything like a full discussion of the various subjects which have occupied our attention, believing that it would be a waste of your time, and indeed of my own, to be preparing and submitting to you in other words what you might easily find discussed as well as it could be discussed in works which were quite accessible to you. I have therefore made it my chief object in general, although on one or two points I have been led to enlarge, and to make the lectures somewhat like a discussion of the subject, to lay before you a mere sketch or outline of the particular topic in hand ; to explain briefly its general nature and its relation to other topics ; to illustrate its importance ; to point out its difficulties, and the things chiefly necessary to be attended to in the study of it ; and to direct you to works where the clearest and soundest views and the fullest information might be obtained regarding it. In consequence of adopting this plan, the lectures have been occupied chiefly with an exhibition of the dry bones of the different subjects, and I have trusted very much to yourselves for clothing them with flesh and blood by your own study and meditation.

I refer on this occasion to the plan which has been generally adopted during the session, solely for this reason, that I may impress upon you the lesson, that unless you have been reading, and reading with judgment and reflection, some of the books

which have been recommended to you, you have as yet a very imperfect knowledge of the subjects to which your attention has been directed; and in making this observation, I wish you to understand that unless you have been reading and studying works upon the different subjects, you not only do not possess that enlarged acquaintance with them which may be expected in those who desire to excel in professional knowledge, but not even that respectable creditable measure of acquaintance with them which may be expected, and indeed should be demanded, of all who are admitted to the office of the holy ministry. The ordinary plans and exercises of a theological seminary like this must of necessity be principally directed to the object of securing as far as possible that all who attend it shall acquire such a creditable acquaintance with the subjects treated of as may fit them, when combined with personal piety and devotedness to God's service, for discharging respectably the functions of the Christian ministry. This measure of knowledge it is the imperative duty of every one of you to acquire during your attendance in this place; and the principal duty of your instructors is to see that you acquire it, and to assist you in the acquisition of it. It is indeed an important collateral advantage that such a love for professional study should be inspired as might lead those of you who may possess the requisite capacities, and enjoy the necessary means and opportunities, to rise to distinguished usefulness and eminence in theological learning. But this is not an object the attainment of which can be said to be incumbent upon you as a body, or which ought materially to influence the general plans and arrangements according to which your theological education ought to be conducted.

The duty which is imperatively incumbent upon every one of you, because it cannot be said to be contingent upon the possession of any superior natural powers, or the enjoyment of any peculiarly favourable opportunities, the object for which your instructors are in some measure responsible, because it can be effected or secured, is, that you *all* acquire a creditable acquaintance with the different departments of theological literature. And you certainly have not acquired even this merely creditable and indispensable measure of acquaintance with the subjects of this year's course, unless in addition to all that you may have heard here, you have been reading upon the different subjects which have

been brought under your notice, and accompanying your reading with careful meditation and reflection ; nay, I think it may be safely asserted that unless you had been led to give a good deal of attention to these subjects before your public studies in this place commenced, you are still, even though you may have been reading and studying diligently during the session, but imperfectly acquainted with them, and are called upon to continue for some time to prosecute the study of them. You may have sometimes, at the termination of a session of college, in the course of your previous studies, been at a loss to decide whether it would be more advantageous and expedient for you to devote your chief attention during the summer and autumn to completing your investigation of your subjects of study in the preceding session, or to be preparing for the labours of the subsequent one. I think there can be little doubt that in regard to most, if not all of you, it will be expedient that your time during this summer should be devoted chiefly to those topics which have occupied your attention during the past session, rather than to those with which, if spared, you are to be engaged during the next. In the next session you will commence the systematic study of Christian theology, and it would be of no material benefit to you that in the interval you had begun an investigation into some one or two of the leading doctrines of the Bible, such as those concerning God, or original sin, instead of examining them fully and carefully in their order, under the superintendence of your instructors. And besides that the preliminary or introductory subjects which have chiefly occupied you during this session require more study and attention than probably you have yet been able to bestow upon them, while you could not easily make any such direct preparation for the labours of next session as would be of any very material advantage to you, there is this additional recommendation in favour of the course I have suggested, viz., that these topics will not again naturally come in your way as subjects of study, that they form no part of what may be expected to occupy any considerable share of your attention during your future studies, I mean during all your future lives, for so long ought your studies to last. On this ground it is desirable that you should critically complete your investigation of these subjects at once, by forming clear and definite conceptions regarding the various topics they embrace, with the leading grounds on

which your convictions rest, and laying them up in your minds as fixed and settled principles, which you not only firmly hold, but are able, if called upon, to explain and defend. I do not mean of course that you are not after the summer to read and reflect any more upon these subjects, for there is no department of theological literature that ought ever to be altogether out of the view of an intelligent and accomplished minister of the gospel. There is no one topic comprehended within the wide range of theological study which ministers may not be required by the circumstances and condition of the church to make a subject of special and prominent attention. Still it is true that when you have once carefully investigated the truth of Christianity, the divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures, and their exclusive supremacy as the only rule of faith and practice, and have made yourselves familiar with the grounds on which your convictions upon these points rest and can be vindicated, it is not so necessary, unless special circumstances in the condition of the church or the community call for it, that you should continue to be habitually devoting any considerable portion of time or attention to the study of these topics.

In like manner, when you have become familiar with the leading principles and rules of hermeneutics, and have acquired such a measure of the necessary knowledge as may be considered almost indispensable before you can commence what can properly be called the critical study of the Scriptures, you will not need to turn back again to the study of these elementary matters, but will rather, in accordance with these principles and rules, and in the application of this knowledge, prosecute the actual work of exegesis. On the other hand, the correct interpretation of Scripture, and the bringing out from a careful study of Scripture accurate views of the mind and will of God in regard to all the various subjects which the statements of Scripture bring before us, and applying them for the instruction and edification of your fellow-men, and the maintenance and extension of God's truth, are to form the great business of your lives. With these objects you are to be habitually and supremely engaged, and all your studies should be made more or less directly subservient to the promotion of them. But on this very account it is only the more necessary that these prolegomena or *præcognoscenda* should now and at once be pretty fully mastered,

that you may be able to give yourselves principally to what should be the chief object of your attention, not only in your preparatory studies for the ministry, but also during the remainder of your lives, should you be spared to engage in its labours. Upon these grounds I would strongly advise you to devote your time during the vacation to revising the studies of the past session, and completing your acquaintance with the subjects which have already been brought under your notice, by careful reflection upon some of the more important and difficult questions, and by an attentive perusal of some of the principal works which have been recommended to you, or of others on the same subjects to which you may have access. It would also be highly beneficial that you should read with care and attention the introductory portions of some of the best systematic works on theology, comprehending the discussion of the subjects of your studies during the past session, such as Turretine, Pictet, or Mastricht, or some of the smaller systems if you have not access to these, such as Marckius' *Medulla* or *Compendium*, or the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiæ* of the professors of Leyden. These works and others of a similar kind discuss in their introductory chapters, under the heads "De Theologia," "De Revelatione," "De Sacra Scriptura," most of the topics to which your attention has been directed. You will find them to be in general just substantially an expansion and exposition of the first chapter of the Confession of Faith, on which I have been commenting. You must read a good deal of Latin theology before you can have any pretensions to the character of accomplished theologians. It is time that you were beginning this exercise, and this is a strong collateral reason why I would earnestly recommend you to read with attention in the course of this summer the introductory books or chapters of some one or more of the systematic works which have been mentioned. I am also much inclined to recommend to you as a useful exercise, well suited to the present state of your studies, to read through the four volumes of Horne's *Introduction*. I have repeatedly had occasion to refer to this work, and to express my opinion concerning it. I think the work has been somewhat overrated, and I have no very high estimate of the ability with which it has been executed ; but it is undoubtedly a book of great research, and fitted to be very useful to the generality of theological students. It contains a great deal of useful and valuable

information, and it points out fully the sources where additional materials may be found in regard to any subject which you may wish more particularly to investigate. It is commonly used rather as a book of reference, which men consult occasionally when they wish for information on any particular topic, than as a book to be read at once from beginning to end. And as a book of reference it is undoubtedly very useful and convenient. Still I would recommend to you, even at the expense of some effort and weariness, to read it through. And the chief reason which induces me to give this recommendation is this, that by this process you would have brought under your notice, and you would acquire some knowledge of, a great many topics which might not otherwise readily come in your way, and of which therefore you might continue ignorant.

There are a great many points connected with the sacred Scriptures, and the explanation and interpretation of them, which are of no very great intrinsic importance, but which it is at once injurious and discreditable for a minister of the gospel to be ignorant of, and with which therefore it is his duty to make himself acquainted. I refer principally to the subjects comprehended under the heads of Scripture history, antiquities, geography, chronology, &c.; the general properties and history of the original languages of Scripture and the cognate dialects, the principal manuscripts and ancient versions, and a mass of topics sometimes comprehended under the general name of bibliography, including especially the history of the different books of Scripture and of their authors, the time and circumstances in which they were composed, &c., &c. These are all topics with which you ought to have some acquaintance. I think this is the proper period in your studies for acquiring the necessary knowledge of these and similar subjects. I have not thought it necessary to occupy your time with bringing them before you, because there are no speculative difficulties connected with the study of them, and because all the necessary information can be easily obtained in many works which are quite accessible. I do not know however any process by which you would be more certain of having all these different topics, of which you ought to know something, brought under your notice more readily, or with less labour, than by your resolving to read through Horne's *Introduction*, and by carrying this resolution

into effect. It is scarcely necessary to remind you that you are not to receive with implicit credence either the facts or the opinions of any works which may be recommended to your perusal and study. There are scarcely any of the works that have been recommended to you which would not, if implicitly followed, lead you in some respects astray. I pointed out at some length, in an early part of the course, the danger against which it would be necessary for you to guard in the study of some works and classes of works, which yet I recommended you to peruse, connected with the evidences of Christianity and the divine origin and authority of the Bible. But the same principle applies to almost all works, that they are to be read with careful discrimination. The exercise of your own independent judgment upon all that you read is necessary to enable you to discriminate truth from falsehood, and to profit aright by the truth, as well as to escape from the injurious influence of the error they contain. You are to call no man master. In regard to all matters of fact, you are to weigh the evidence that may be adduced; and in regard to all matters of opinion, you are to sift the arguments that may be presented to you; and in regard to everything that admits of it, whether matter of fact or of opinion, you are to bring it to the test of the only unerring standard—the word of God. Let me direct your attention to a topic which I think I have pressed upon you before, viz., the necessity of prosecuting your studies systematically, of following a definite plan, instead of indulging in indiscriminate or desultory reading. The extent of theological literature is so vast, it consists of so many different branches, all having their respective sources of interest and attraction, that young men who are fond of study are in some danger when they first enter upon the field, either, on the one hand, of selecting some one particular department to which they give almost undivided attention, or, on the other, of reading on without plan or selection. Desultory reading without plan or selection is in any branch of science or literature unfavourable at once to the cultivation and improvement of the mental faculties and the acquisition of solid and useful knowledge. And the giving of exclusive attention, or anything like it, to any one department of theological study, is inconsistent with the great object to which your studies in this place should be directed in preparation for the office of the ministry. This object implies that you acquire and

possess a respectable measure of acquaintance with all the leading departments of theological study; that you know something of everything which it might injure your usefulness and respectability as ministers of the gospel to be ignorant of; and this can be secured only by your acquiring, during the brief period usually allotted to preparatory study, some general knowledge of what the principal subjects are which theological science embraces, and then seeking to give to each of these systematically a degree of time and attention proportioned to their intrinsic importance and value. You may possibly be hereafter placed in circumstances in which there may be no dereliction of duty, nothing sinful or injurious, in your selecting some one department of theological literature, and cultivating it with peculiar care and diligence, *i.e.* provided you reserve to the study of the word of God its proper and indefeasible supremacy; but at present it is your duty to follow a plan, and a plan in the case of all of you substantially the same—a plan framed with a reference to the one object of securing that as far as possible you shall all acquire during the course of your studies that measure of acquaintance with theological science in all its leading departments, the want of which would be injurious to your usefulness and respectability as ministers of the gospel. You have a vast deal yet to learn. There is no reason and no excuse for idleness; and while there is a loud call in your present circumstances for much reading, study, and meditation, you will best secure the object you are bound to aim at by adopting a regular plan in the prosecution of your studies, and following it out with firmness and perseverance. I would fain hope that by attention to these considerations and directions, accompanied by fervent and habitual prayer for the teaching and guidance of God's Spirit, you will be enabled to make much progress in your studies, and will return, if it please God to spare you, at the commencement of another session, with the subjects that have engaged your attention during this one well digested and fully mastered, having had some practice and experience also in the careful and critical study of the word of God, and ready to enter with zeal and eagerness upon the proper study of systematic theology.

I cannot conclude without trying again to impress upon you two practical considerations—first, that you have other matters to attend to besides the prosecution of your studies, and these too

still more important than extending your knowledge of theology, though concurrent with and auxiliary to it ; and second, that for the attainment of these objects, as well as for the successful prosecution of your studies, you are entirely dependent upon the agency of the Holy Spirit. The more important matters to which I refer are searching and trying your ways to ascertain your true character and motives, and growing in grace. You ought to know the motives by which you are really animated in aspiring to the office of the ministry, and in prosecuting your theological studies with that view ; and especially you ought to know whether you are influenced by a real desire to promote the glory of God, the honour of Christ, and the salvation of your fellow-men. Sin is deceitful, the heart of man is deceitful above all things. There is, therefore, considerable danger that you may be mistaken about the motives by which you are really animated. You have, perhaps, not devoted much time to meditation and self-examination during the business and bustle of the session, and yet it has probably afforded materials for these exercises which may still be turned to good account. You have been placed in somewhat new circumstances, and have been engaged in somewhat new occupations, and the spirit which may have been in consequence manifested, the feelings which may have been thus excited, may, when subjected to a reflex process of examination, contribute to throw some light upon your actual character and motives. You should consider whether you have been taking that deep interest in your studies that might have been expected, whether you have been carrying them on in the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, and under a deep sense of your responsibility to him ; whether you have been cherishing a due sense of your dependence upon the agency of the Holy Spirit, and have been habitually and earnestly seeking his guidance and direction. These and similar questions afford suitable topics for self-examination which might now be prosecuted with advantage, and the prosecution of which might give you some insight into the real state of your hearts. And though not convinced that this state of mind and feeling, which your profession, your occupations, and your objects plainly demanded, was altogether wanting, you could scarcely fail to see from such an investigation, that it was still but very imperfectly developed, and that you still greatly need to be growing in grace. You ought to feel that you still need

to be impressed with a much deeper sense of your obligations to Him that died for you, and that rose again, and to live much more fully not unto yourselves but unto him. You should be aware that you are called upon to walk more by faith and less by sight, to live more under the power of the world to come; and that you are bound to labour more than you have hitherto done for the attainment of these results, and especially to take care that your eye be single, that thus your whole body may be full of light. And finally, never forget that, for the attainment of all spiritual objects, all objects bearing upon the promotion of Christ's cause and your own eternal welfare, you are wholly dependent upon the agency of the Holy Spirit, which God giveth to every man severally as he will. It is he alone who can fully open up to you the state of your own hearts and motives, who can carry on the work which he may have begun in you, and enable you to make any real progress in the knowledge of divine things through the word. The causes of your remaining ignorance and ungodliness, of the imperfection of your attainments in knowledge and in holiness, may in one most important aspect of them be summed up in this, that you are quenching or grieving the Holy Spirit, that you are acting in a way fitted to provoke him to take his departure from you, to withhold his enlightening and sanctifying influences, and to leave you to yourselves. And on the other hand, the one grand comprehensive rule by the observance of which you are to seek to promote your growth in knowledge and in grace is, that you cherish such a state of mind, and pursue such a course of conduct, as the word of God, in making known the principles that regulate the communication of the Spirit, shews to be best fitted to contribute to your enjoying abundantly and increasingly his gracious presence, and his enlightening and sanctifying operations. Let these great truths then become deeply impressed upon your mind, and let them exert a constant and paramount influence upon your heart and conduct. And remember that the Holy Spirit may be quenched and grieved, provoked to withhold his gracious influences from you, not only by what you may regard as the more heinous sins in thought, word, and deed, but also by shortcomings which you may be disposed to consider as more venial and less dangerous, by the indulgence of self-seeking and vainglory, of sloth and negligence,

by the want of a due sense of your responsibility for the improvement of all your privileges and opportunities, or of due diligence and self-denial in the actual improvement of them. And you will not forget that we have the clearest scriptural evidence that he is grieved by our withholding from him the honour which is due to him, by any failure to realise our entire dependence upon him and the absolute necessity of his agency, and more especially by our neglecting or performing amiss that great duty, the discharge of which is represented in Scripture as bearing more directly and immediately than anything else upon the enjoyment of his presence and his saving agency, asking that we may receive, seeking that we may find, knocking that the door may be opened to us.

Let me conclude with adopting and pressing upon you the words with which the great apostle—he who, next to Him who was his Master and your Master, is the great model of a Christian minister—closed his first epistle to the church at Thessalonica, “Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things: hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. Brethren pray for us. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. AMEN.”

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